



A LEGISLATIVE AGENCY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**Your Agritourism Business  
in Pennsylvania**  
*A Resource Handbook*

SECOND EDITION



# **Your Agritourism Business in Pennsylvania: A Resource Handbook**

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# Part One: Is Agritourism Right for You?

In this section, we will:

- Introduce agritourism in Pennsylvania.
- Provide some of the reasons to consider agritourism.
- Help you decide if agritourism is right for you.

## Introduction to Agritourism in Pennsylvania

[Agritourism](#) is the combination of two of Pennsylvania's largest industries: agriculture and tourism. Agritourism represents an increasing opportunity for the tourism and agricultural industries. Agribusiness and tourism are two of the [six key industries](#) identified by the Department of Community and Economic Development for growth in Pennsylvania, which means there are many available resources for those looking to get into or wanting to grow their business. This handbook is just one of those many resources.

The first edition of this handbook was published in 2008. We have kept the overall format of this second edition similar, with some important updates to several sections. Even if you were one of our readers for the first edition, there are many new things to learn in this updated edition!

## Purpose of this Handbook

Together agriculture and tourism present a growing opportunity for Pennsylvania's agricultural operators. Generally, this handbook is for agricultural operators or farmers and not communities or regions that intend to develop agritourism. This book is handy for those who are just getting started or those who want current agritourism business ideas. Most readers of this handbook are well versed in the practices of agricultural enterprise. Therefore, the priority in this book is to define agritourism to develop a better understanding of how agriculture and tourism are related. The American Farm Bureau Federation approved the following definition of agritourism in 2004:

*Agritourism refers to an enterprise at a working farm, ranch, or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates income for the owner. Agricultural tourism refers to the act of visiting a working farm or any horticultural or agricultural operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation that also adds to the economic viability of the site.*  
(American Farm Bureau Federation, 2004)

There are a few essential parts to this definition. First, there are places in the business of agriculture. Next, there must be people, called visitors, enjoying these places. Finally, the mix between agricultural business and visitors is the ability to generate income and economic viability. There must be a bridge between the agricultural business and the visitor to produce income and economic viability. As a reader of this handbook, you already know the business of agriculture. To move toward agritourism, you need to know how to take what you know about

agriculture and develop it into something for [agritourist](#) visitors. This handbook explains important ways to make that connection with that visitor.

Making the tourism connection with your current agricultural business does not have to be “a leap into the unknown.” Many agritourism activities can generate interest that encourages people to visit farms. It is fundamentally important to understand that different visitors contribute to agritourism operations differently because not all visitors meet the definition of a tourist.

Some people are from your local area. These visitors are still valued guests that contribute to your agritourism business. However, local visitors may not meet the definition of a [tourist](#). These are [recreationists](#). The definitions of ‘local’ and ‘tourist’ vary, but usually, agencies or organizations set a limit based on distance or time traveled to determine who is or who is not a tourist. When we attract visitors from outside the local area, it contributes new money to the local economy.

Even though it is important to distinguish the difference, determining these differences can be difficult. Generally, the distance people travel, and the length of their stay determines the money they spend away from home. Try to keep this relationship in mind as you consider the information in this handbook. Agritourism can attract people to your property from down the street or around the world. The type of person you attract will depend on decisions or changes made as you build your agritourism business.

## How to Use this Handbook

You may be new to agritourism, or you may have been in the business for years. Either way, this handbook can be useful. The book has four parts. The first two parts, *Is Agritourism Right for You* and *Getting Started*, help those who are new to the business of agritourism. The last two parts, *Strategies for Success* and *Beyond this Handbook*, serve as ongoing sources of agritourism startup information and handy references for those already in the business.

We’ve also added some navigational tools for you to get to the most helpful part of the book. The table of contents is interactive, which means you can click on any heading to navigate to that section. Then you can click the “Return to Table of Contents” link at the bottom of every page to navigate back to the table of contents again. We also added a [glossary](#) to this edition with some helpful definitions. When we use that word in the text, you can click the underlined blue link to skip to that definition in the glossary.

This handbook shares insights specific to agritourism in Pennsylvania, which is unique compared to agritourism taking place in other states. Likewise, every agricultural operation is different. You can make your agritourism business unique from other businesses using your creativity, the character of your property, and the mix of visitors you attract. Several examples, diagrams, worksheets, and links to outside sources in this handbook will help you to get started. You can click the underlined links to leave the document for that outside source. Since we don’t manage these outside web pages, sometimes documents might move from when we put the

link into this document, which is called a broken link. If you ever come across a broken link, you can use the title and other information in the text of the documents or in our [references section](#) to easily find it using a search engine like Google or Bing.

This handbook can give you ideas, direction, and advice for those in the agritourism business. However, this handbook is not a substitute for comprehensive legal, insurance, tax, or financial counseling. It does not replace the need to determine and understand rules and regulations for your specific area. Wherever possible, this handbook directs you to those who can answer questions a handbook like this cannot. This handbook and the resources it contains will provide you with the direction you need to develop a successful business. Ensuring accurate information has been a top concern of the authors composing this book. Please note that the information in this handbook is subject to change.

Developing an agritourism business takes energy, time, and money. Before making a move to start a business, make sure to take the time to consider the question, “Is the agritourism field right for me?” This section of the handbook contains a few ideas and tools to help you decide.

## **Agritourism in Pennsylvania**

Before getting started with the specifics, take some time to explore the big picture of agritourism in Pennsylvania. The agritourism industry is growing in the United States. Here in Pennsylvania, although there are concentrations in some counties versus others, agritourism is in every county in Pennsylvania and continues to grow.

The number of agritourism operators in Pennsylvania varies based on the method used by the source. For example, the National Agriculture Statistics Service reported in 2017 that approximately 711 farms reported receiving income from agritourism (NASS, 2017). The definition of agritourism is a bit broader for this handbook, so the numbers are slightly different from the NASS. At the time of the first edition, there were 1,795 agritourism operators inventoried in Pennsylvania. At the time of this publication, there were 2,297, an increase of 502 operators, or about 28 percent, overall, since the initial inventory in 2005 (see Figure 1)<sup>1</sup>. So, the NASS and the researchers for this handbook agree, more people are getting involved in the business.

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<sup>1</sup> The agritourism inventory was completed by Gina Kilmer '21, Tourism, Hospitality, and Event Studies student at California University of Pennsylvania. Mapping was by Hailey Stall, Geographic Info Technology current student at California University of Pennsylvania

## 2020 Distribution of Agritourism Providers by County

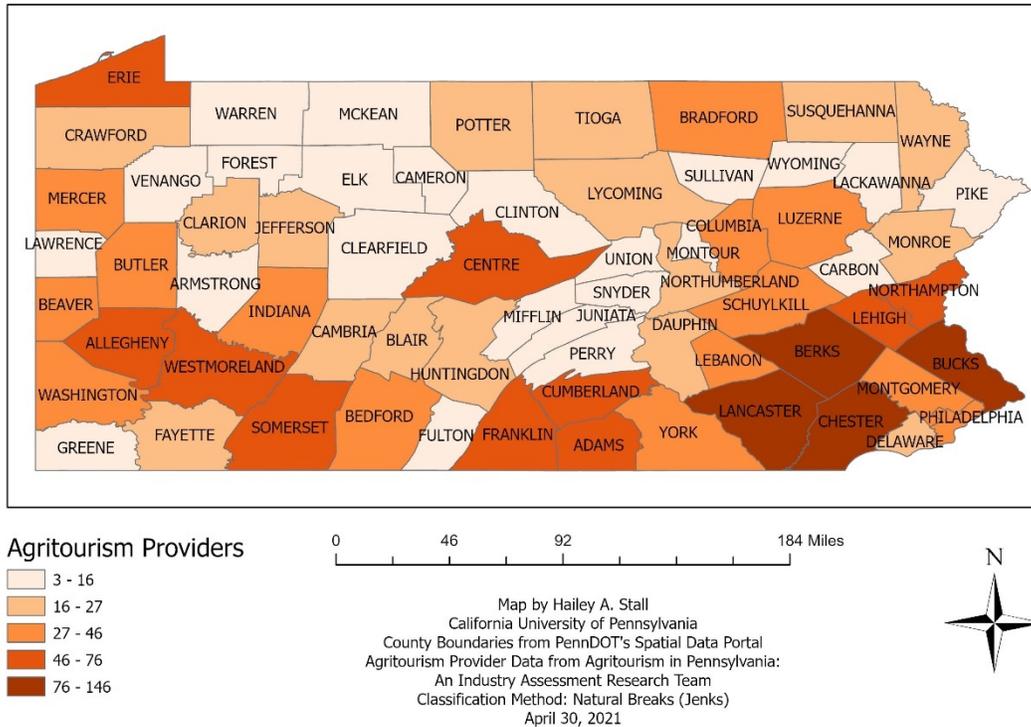


Figure 1

### Agritourism Activities Available in Pennsylvania

There are many different activities to choose from that can fit your motivations and your agricultural operation. These activities fit into four main categories:

- Farm retail/dining,
- Agricultural education or agri-education,
- Agricultural entertainment or agri-tainment and,
- Agricultural lodging or agri-lodging.

Although the geographic concentration of agritourism is more significant in some parts of the state, the range of available activities is quite extensive. According to the primary category, farm-retail and dining are the most offered activity in Pennsylvania. This classification is followed by agri-tainment and agri-education. Agri-lodging is the least offered agritourism activity in Pennsylvania.

## Agritourism Ideas

There are many reasons for involvement in agritourism besides the prospect of additional income. There are reasons people like you choose to get into agritourism. Some of the reasons agricultural operators consider agritourism include:

- To develop or enhance a hobby or interest.
- To employ themselves or their family.
- To provide a community service.
- To learn new skills or try something different.
- To preserve land.
- To promote or sustain farm heritage.
- To protect the farm for future generations.

Regardless of the reasons for considering agritourism, many activities can match motivations while also fitting into existing agricultural operations. A specific example is the [farm-retail](#) and dining category. This category often includes products that you can sell based on your current agricultural operation.

In some cases, the product might be scenery or peace and quiet. Another option is farm dining, which involves people visiting a farm to consume food or beverages. Some examples of other activities include:

- Breweries
- Christmas tree farms/cut your own
- Corporate events/company picnics
- Distilleries
- Farm markets
- Gift shops/agricultural crafts
- Ice cream shops/bakeries
- Restaurants/food concessions
- Roadside stands
- U-pick operations
- Weddings/special events
- Wineries

Another category of agritourism activity is [agri-education](#). Agri-education involves bringing people to a farm to learn about farming and farm life. Ideas for these types of activities include:

- Agricultural exhibits/tours
- Crop identification programs
- Farm-related museums
- Garden/nursery tours
- School tours

- Winery/brewery tours

[Agri-tainment](#) combines an agricultural setting with entertaining activities. In other words, agri-tainment is a little bit of agriculture combined with many fun activities for visitors. Some examples of activities that include agriculture and entertainment are:

- Agricultural fairs/festivals/shows
- Children’s activities
- Corn mazes
- Haunted houses/hayrides
- Horseback riding
- Outdoor recreation (e.g., fishing/hunting, cross-country skiing, etc.)
- Petting zoos
- Rodeos
- Sleigh rides
- Wagon rides

[Agri-lodging](#) involves guests staying overnight on an agricultural property. Currently operating or historic farms can host this type of accommodation. These can be full-service or limited-service accommodations. People are willing to stay in many different types of accommodations, from full luxury to no roof over their heads at all. Some ideas include:

- Bed and breakfasts
- Camping/campgrounds
- Corporate or religious retreats
- Country inns or resorts
- Dude/guest ranches
- Hostels

When agritourism activities are viewed according to the distribution of primary activities offered, the most offered agritourism activities in Pennsylvania are school tours, farm markets, roadside stands, agriculture exhibits/tours, and gift shops/agricultural crafts.

It is always wise to know what is happening in your state or community with agritourism. However, don’t feel you have to follow what everyone else is doing. Remember, your imagination is the only limit!

### **Do you want to be an Agritourism Operator?**

Now that you have an overview of agritourism, it’s time to focus on your agritourism possibilities. First, think about yourself. Then, think about the people you already have or may want to have on your farm for daily operations. It is important to consider the people who will sustain the agricultural part of your business and the people who will operate the business’s agritourism side. Workers can be outside employees, neighbors, family, or community workers.

Employees can work as volunteers, for pay, or sometimes for other incentives such as educational experience. Be sure to explore all options when considering staffing needs.

### ***Bust the Myths!***

When you start to think about the particulars, there may be some preconceptions that get in your way to visualize your success. Many myths might make it seem too difficult to start an agritourism business. Consider the following:

<b>Myth</b>	<b>Reality</b>
<b><i>Agritourism takes a lot of financial investment.</i></b>	The number of assets you already have may surprise you.
<b><i>Agritourism means you never get to take a break.</i></b>	There are many activities to choose from. You are your boss and can choose when you want to operate the agritourism business.
<b><i>Agritourism requires me to make big changes.</i></b>	You can decide what will work best for your location, so the need for changes will depend on your vision of the new business.
<b><i>Agritourism requires a lot of experience to be successful.</i></b>	The basics of agritourism success take good planning and management. This requires diligence, which builds your experience.
<b><i>Starting an agritourism business requires the hiring of new employees.</i></b>	You can decide how large your operation is going to be. Many activities require only you.
<b><i>Agritourism means that many people will be on my land.</i></b>	You control your comfort level with visitors. You can be active in agritourism even with just one customer at a time.
<b><i>Agritourists are annoying and will be a nuisance.</i></b>	You can match agritourism activities to things that interest you. Good matching will mean that you are more likely to attract people that you can relate to.

Table 1

### **Break into a New Mindset: Think Tourism**

It is important to “think tourism” when evaluating whether agritourism is right for you. Dealing with tourism is unlike dealing with any other product. A [product](#) is simply something you deliver and sell to a customer. Products can range from things that are touched called *goods*, to things that are experienced called *services*. For example, a hammer is a *good*. The way a person who sells the hammer treats a customer is a [service](#).

To start thinking from an agritourism perspective, you need to tap into a side of your business that may not be familiar: the tourism side. Agritourism involves goods and services. Tourism tends to be more of an experience than a good. This distinction may present a different

perspective for you. Often you will have to think more about the “feelings people get” when they are participating in agritourism and less about the actual “things they walk away with” when they leave your farm.

Production and consumption of the product are additional traits that make tourism businesses unique. The previous example categorizes a hammer as a good. A manufacturer produces the hammer and then ships the hammer to a store where consumers can buy it. This relationship between producer and consumer is likely the one that is familiar to you. A product is made in one place and is consumed in another. Tourism is different from this typical relationship.

Tourism products are produced and consumed in the same place. As the agritourism operator, you produce the agritourism product at your farm, and agritourists visit your farm to experience that product by becoming a part of it. This range of tangibility and intangibility can be visualized using the goods to services continuum, which is summarized below using agritourism examples in Figure 2.

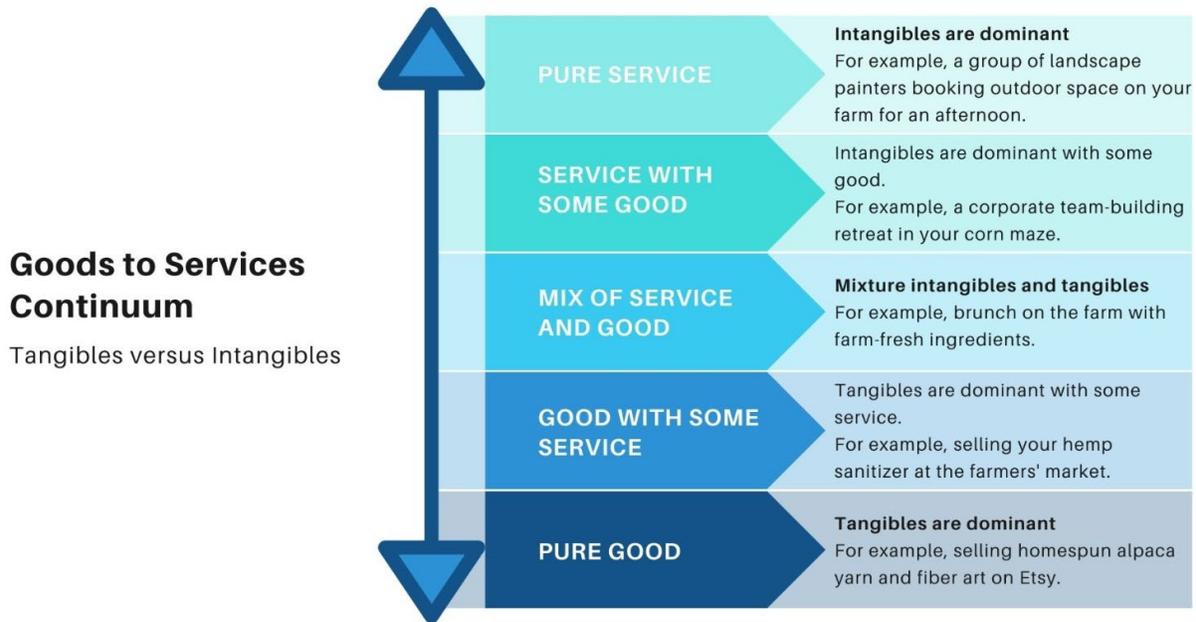


Figure 2

### Did You Answer the Question? Is Agritourism Right for You?

Now that you have had some time to consider agritourism basics, did you decide on an answer? Whether it was yes or no, it is still important to point out that agritourism is not for everyone. You may not have the time, you may have other off-farm employment commitments, you may lack interest, or you may not think you are ready for agritourism.

If you have decided agritourism is right after reading this section, continue to the next section: Getting Started!

# Part Two: Getting Started

In this section, we will:

- Help you inventory your agritourism assets.
- Introduce important business startup tasks, including writing a business plan.
- Discuss the basics about keeping your business safe and compliant with local, state, and national regulations.

## Agritourism Asset Assessment

You have decided to get started in agritourism! The first step is to inventory your agritourism assets. To set up a plan for your agritourism future, you need to know what you already have of value. The most important assets are agricultural, financial, and human assets. We will cover each of these in the next sections.

## Agricultural and Financial Assets

This section uses the term “[assets](#)” generically to mean *resources with potential or immediate cash value*. In business, assets consist of two primary categories. *Financial assets* refer to money in the form of cash and savings. *Real assets* refer to the value of land, equipment, machinery, and livestock. Other assets might include stocks and bonds that will sell quickly for cash. Assets that are likely to sell within a year are called *liquid assets*. Do not worry if you are short on assets. Some sources provide grants, loans, loan guarantees, and tax credits or abatements.

## Human Assets

Human assets refer to the people that will offer a helping hand as paid or unpaid employees (refer to the [Human Resources](#) section later in the book).

Now, it is time to search for assets that you may not realize are important. You may learn that your assets are more than you expected. In taking this beginning inventory, remember to try to see your property with fresh eyes. There may be a lot of potential hidden on your property in things that seem very common to you. Try to see your property as though you were seeing it for the first time.

Think of the features of your agricultural enterprise and ways that they can be used for agritourism. Assets can be classified as:

- Natural,
- Physical,
- Heritage, and,
- Combined.

Natural assets are features on your property that occur naturally. These can be further categorized as:

Asset Type	Assets Classification	Examples	Agritourism Activity Examples
Natural			
	Scenery and atmosphere	Views, quiet areas	Hiking, meditation, yoga
	Wildlife and insects	Big game, small game, waterfowl, butterflies	Fee-based hunting, bird watching
	Livestock	Horses, sheep, goats, cows	Trail rides, sheep shearing, petting zoo, milking demonstration
	Hydrology	Lake, stream, creek, pond, waterfall	Kayaking, fishing, or related activities
	Topography	Elevated area, cave, rock formation, lookouts	Rock climbing, rappelling, photography
	Vegetation	Forest, grassland, crops	Corn mazes, crop identification, u-pick
	Climate and Seasons	Precipitation, weather patterns, growing season, planting season, harvest season	Stargazing, pumpkin walk

**Table 2**

Physical assets are things that you already have that are tangible or have material existence that can be used for agritourism. When considering your assets, remember that they can be multi-use. For example, your operating silo or turnout paddock may function as part of your daily farming activities. However, that same silo or paddock may make a beautiful background for an avid photographer.

These assets can be classified as:

Asset Type	Assets Classification	Examples	Agritourism Activity Examples
Physical			
	Residential	Main house, bunkhouse, cabin	Guest rooms, bed and breakfast
	Non-residential	Pen, paddock, barn, outbuilding, machine shop	Rodeo, cider mill, gift shop
	Other function	Pavilion, play area, shooting range, trails	Corporate cookouts, family reunion, geo-caching course
	Transportation	Wagon, tractor	Haunted hayride, tractor pull, farm tour
	Space	Parking area, camping area, seating area	Corn maze, u-pick, concert location
	Decorative	Silo, bridge, windmill, gazebo, greenhouse, garden, water tower	Practically any activity will involve the scenery.

**Table 3**

Heritage assets are elements that link to history based on groups to which you belong. These assets can include cultural backgrounds such as family, community, religion, ethnic group, military, industry, politics, and economy.

Heritage assets might be classified as:

Asset Type	Assets Classification	Examples	Agritourism Activity Examples
Heritage			
	Built heritage	Historic barn, civil war site, mine shaft, dam	Architectural tour, photography safari, reenactment, sightseeing
	Cultural heritage	Food, crafts, music, cemetery, petroglyph	Bakery, candle making, quilting, art gallery, music festival, ghost walk, or escorted walking tour
	Natural heritage	Trails, viewpoints, meadows	Interpretive trail, nature photography

**Table 4**

***Pulling it together:***

Remember the importance of location. Once you have a better idea of what is available on your property, think about your surroundings.

How far away is/are:

- The market – which is a possible source of potential visitors,
- Similar enterprises – being close to like enterprises does not always mean competition, it can be a benefit to you too; and,
- Facilities and services necessary for visitors – like shopping, food/beverage, accommodation, transportation, and other attractions.

Not all activities have to take place on your farm. Try to think about off-farm activities that can enhance your agritourism operation too.

Now that you are better acquainted with your agritourism assets, it's time to plan.

## Agritourism Activity: Worksheet

The possibilities for agritourism attractions and services are virtually limitless. They can include almost any activity, from hayrides to rodeos. When surveying your land for resources, it is helpful to make a list of all the possible attraction activities for your future business. The following checklist will help you explore activity options.

- Agricultural Activity Demonstration (milk processing, threshing, spinning, sheep shearing)
- Animal Races
- Apple Picking
- Art Shows
- Auctioneering
- Batting Cages
- Bed and Breakfast
- Bicycle Trails and Rentals
- Bird Watching
- Boating, Canoeing, Kayaking, Tubing or Rafting
- Cabin Lodging
- Camping
- Carnival or Circus
- Catering Services
- Cave Tours (Show caves)
- Children's Camps
- Christmas Tree Lighting
- Clambakes
- Classes, Clinics, or Demonstrations (farming, ranch skills, cooking, planting, harvesting, fishing, hunting, etc.)
- Community Supported Agriculture
- Contests (eating, baking, chili cook-off)
- Corn Cannon (air cannon that shoots corn at targets)
- Corn Maze (educational, haunted)
- Craft Fair
- Cut Your Own Christmas Trees
- Dairy Shares
- Display Gardens (flowers, greenery, herbs)
- Dog Parks
- Educational or Technical Tours
- Event Hosting (birthday parties, car shows, corporate retreats, reunions, receptions)
- Face Painting
- Farm or Ranch Work Experience
- Farm Stays
- Fee Fishing
- Fee Hunting (dove, duck, goose, pheasant, turkey, deer, small game)
- Festivals (seasonal, harvest, food, holiday, or cultural events)
- Flea Market
- Food truck
- Fudge Shop
- Game Preserve or Guided Hunts
- Geocaching (Hide-n-seek with GPS)
- Ghost tours, campfire stories, or storytelling
- Go-Carting
- Goat Walk (Climbing playground for goats: people watch)
- Golf Driving Range or Mini Golf
- Guided Crop Tours
- Guiding and Outfitting
- Habitat Improvement Projects
- Haunted Barn or House
- Hay Bale Maze
- Hayrides
- Hiking Trails
- Historical Museums and Displays
- Horseback Trail Riding
- Hosting Sports Tournaments
- Hot Air Balloon Rides
- Hunting Dog Training and Competitions
- Ice Skating
- Kettle Corn Shop
- Landmark Trails
- Living History Events/Reenactments
- Maple Tree Tapping
- Mountain Biking
- Music Concerts
- Nature education/ wildlife watching
- Off-Road Vehicle Driving Areas
- On-Farm Retailing
- Pack Trips
- Paint Ball
- Petting Zoo
- Photography/Painting
- Picnic Area
- Playground
- Pony Rides
- Pumpkin Painting
- Pumpkin Picking
- Refreshment Sales
- Rent a Cow or Tree
- Roadside Markets
- Rock Climbing or Rappelling
- Rodeos
- Rural or Folk Crafts and Traditions
- Scavenger Hunts
- School Tours or Activities
- Self-Guided Driving Tours
- Shooting Range (moving-target skeet)
- Sleigh Rides
- Sorghum Maze
- Specialty Food Business
- Square Dancing
- Stage Shows
- Story Telling
- Swimming Area
- Vintage or Yard Sales
- Wagon Trains
- Wilderness Experiences or Wildlife Viewing
- Winery Tour or Wine Tasting
- Working Farm Stays
- Target Practice/Clay Shooting

## **The Business and Finance Plan: A Road Map for Your Agritourism Future**

Agritourism is a product that depends on good service. It is sometimes hard to visualize agritourism as a product since it comprises experiences and services that you cannot see or touch. However, agritourism is still a product that is purchased. Like other parts of your agricultural business, you need to anticipate the future like you would with your other agricultural products. Anticipating the future is what planning is all about.

The first and most essential step is the [business and finance plan](#). You should already have a plan in place for your agricultural operation. Once you have evaluated your assets and have a better idea of possible agritourism activities, you need to determine where agritourism will fit into your overall farm plan.

Agritourism can be a supplemental part of the overall production, or it can comprise the main functions of your business. Deciding the role agritourism will play in your operation will help you structure your business plan.

If the plan involves agritourism as a minor addition, then you may consider it as supplementary. For example, you may want to have people on your farm for an annual festival and remain closed to the public for most of the year. In this instance, agritourism would not be a major part of the overall farm plan.

You may want to incorporate agritourism activities as a part of other farm-based activities. For example, you may continue regular crop production and offer agritourism activities such as a u-pick operation. Agritourism activities should then comprise about half of the overall farm plan.

Consider making agritourism the main form of agricultural production. For example, you might decide that your farm's leading source of income will be a farm stay or farm bed and breakfast. If agritourism is your sole source of agricultural production, your agritourism business plan is also the farm plan.

### **Introduction to the Business Plan**

A business plan is a document that outlines the future of a business over a set period. A business plan must contain the fundamental elements of:

- Defining the business,
- Outlining the financial plan for the business,
- Outlining the marketing plan for the product or products, and,
- Outlining the management plan after the initial startup process.

According to the [U.S. Small Business Administration](#), you should ask yourself the following fundamental questions before beginning the business planning process:

- What service or product does your business provide, and what needs does it fill?
- Who are the potential customers for your product or service, and why will they purchase it from you?
- How will you reach your potential customers?
- Where will you get the financial resources to start your business?

This handbook outlines many aspects of business planning about agritourism operations, such as finance and marketing. Business planning considerations can be very complicated and technical. The specifics of business planning will depend on the type of agricultural operation on which the agritourism business is to be based. These specifics are generally beyond the scope of this book. Fortunately, you do not have to weather the business planning process alone or incur significant expenses getting technical assistance. Pennsylvania is equipped with free technical support through the [Agriculture Business Development Center](#), the [Pennsylvania Small Business Development Centers](#), and your local [Penn State Agricultural Extension](#).

Consulting one of these sources or another professional will help you develop a comprehensive and strategic business plan. Consulting a professional is an additional way to safeguard yourself and the success of your operation.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture’s [Agricultural Business Development Center](#) (ABDC) offers several services. This center was established in 2019 as part of the PA Farm Bill (PDA, 2020). The ABDC supports business planning for beginning farmers and those transitioning from farming to another phase of their life. It also supports agricultural diversification by providing business, financial, and technical expertise.

The Department of Agriculture also offers grant assistance. The [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Farm Vitality Planning Grant](#) provides professional services for farmers, prospective farmers, and others interested in developing farm-based businesses. You can look to them for financial and technical support for business planning support, transition to farm ownership, farm expansion, and diversification of your agricultural operation.

Another source of support is Pennsylvania’s Small Business Development Centers. The [Small Business Development Centers](#) cover many topics, including business planning, loans, and taxation. The Small Business Development Centers also offer local services through their [16 business centers](#) that provide consultation and assistance. Topics include business planning, naming, business registration, loans, and taxes. They offer up-to-date research, worksheets, and self-paced online training in addition to other consulting and training services. Agribusiness is one of the SBDCs targeted industries. So, they have expertise related to your farm-business ideas.

In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) offers many options for business startup assistance, such as [The Entrepreneur’s Guide: Starting](#)

[and Growing a Business in Pennsylvania](#), which you can download and print or read online. The guide is set up with helpful symbols for the first-time entrepreneur and existing business owner, so you can navigate quickly to the section that applies to you.

DCED also offers business assistance, including business financing, taxation, and technical assistance. You should also check to see if you are in one of the [Keystone Opportunity](#) or [Innovation Zones](#), which may make your business eligible for tax relief, funding, or other incentives. The DCED program can also help direct you to some specific funding sources for farmers, such as the [First Industries Fund](#) and the [Next Generation Farmer Loan](#).

Another local resource is DCED's [Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance \(PREP\)](#). There are 10 PREP regions in Pennsylvania. Each regional PREP team works together to coordinate the resources and services offered by local economic development service providers, including:

- Industrial Development Organizations (IDOs)
- Local Development Districts (LDDs)
- Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs)
- Industrial Resource Centers (IRCs)
- Complementary economic development organizations

DCED has many other programs that may also apply to your farm-based business. You can search for them using their [program finder tool](#).

## **Additional Important Business Start-Up Tasks**

### ***Naming the Business***

Once you start turning your ideas into a business, coming up with the business name is one way to start making things feel real. However, before you become too committed, make sure that name has not been taken already in Pennsylvania. There is an [easy search tool](#) through the Pennsylvania Department of State, which is the state entity that looks after business naming.

If the name you want for your business is available, part of the planning process is to get your business registered before you do business. Depending on your product or service, you may need to register with several state agencies, including the Pennsylvania Department of State, Pennsylvania Department of Revenue, and Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry ([Business.pa.gov](#), 2021). This registration is required for taxation and other legal matters.

For every type of business, the potential business owner must file for a [fictitious name](#) if intending to create a name for the business. The fictitious name means the name under which you are doing business that is not your name. Sometimes this is called DBA for short or “doing business as.” Let’s say your name is Jane Smith. If you named your business *Jane Smith’s Orchard Fun*, then you do not need to file a DBA or fictitious name. Therefore, sometimes the

fictitious name is the DBA name because your legal name is in the business name. However, if you want to call the business *Orchard Fun*, you need to [register](#) the fictitious name. Failure to file your fictitious name can cause many legal problems, starting with a \$500 fine (DOS, 2021). Always use your business name consistently, so everything matches to avoid confusion and any tax problems later.

### ***Which Type of Business?***

When starting a business, there are several decisions you must make concerning the type of business you intend to form. Business types include sole proprietorships, partnerships, cooperatives, and corporations, to name a few. The simplest type of business is a sole proprietorship. The financial section of this book focuses mainly on this form of business.

The difference between business types involves the degree of personal [liability](#) owners have for company operations. Corporations and limited liability companies protect owners more than sole proprietorships or partnerships. Let's have a look at each of these business structure options next.

### ***Sole Proprietorships***

The sole proprietorship structure is a simple and common business organization format. According to DCED (2021), most small businesses are sole proprietorships. [Sole proprietorships](#) have the advantage of sole control of the company by one single owner. Other advantages include less paperwork, minimum legal restrictions, owner retention of profits, and easier discontinuation of the business. A major disadvantage is unlimited personal liability, which means legal responsibility for all debts and liabilities of the business. Other disadvantages include limited ability to raise capital and termination of the business upon the owner's death. If you choose to start as a sole proprietor, you can form a partnership or corporation as the business grows.

### ***Partnerships***

[Partnerships](#) resemble sole proprietorships, with the difference being two or more owners in a partnership. DCED (2021) identifies several advantages of partnerships, including the partners' financial and managerial strength and indirect taxation of profits. Some disadvantages include personal liability for business debts, termination of the business with the death of a partner, and the fact that any partner can commit the firm to obligations.

### ***Corporations***

[Corporations](#) are the most complex form of business organization. They are more expensive and difficult to start because of paperwork requirements. Business activities are restricted to the rules established when the corporation is formed, documented in a charter. One advantage of a corporation is limited liability. Liability is limited to the amount owners have paid into their share of stock. Death of owners or transfers of shares does not affect the continuity of a corporation. Some disadvantages are extensive record-keeping, close regulation, and double taxation, as taxes are assessed on profits and dividends paid to owners.

## ***Cooperatives***

[Cooperatives](#) bear some resemblance to corporations in that they involve many members. According to the National Cooperative Business Association (2020), a cooperative is an association of people who voluntarily unite to meet common economic or other goals through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. In a cooperative, membership is open and voluntary, with all members making fair economic contributions to the business. All cooperative members have equal voting rights for electing representatives and may individually vote on decisions concerning the cooperative. Cooperatives can be good for a community by providing opportunities for training, education, and information. More information on cooperatives is available on the [National Cooperative Business Association website](#).

If you are still unsure what type of business is right for you or need more help choosing a business structure, please visit the Pennsylvania [Business One-Stop Shop](#) section on business structures.

## ***Setting up banking***

Once you have a business structure and a business name, you will need somewhere to process money. If you are a sole proprietor, you can set up banking using your social security number. If there is more than one owner, you need to get your Employer Identification Number (EIN) first. The [EIN application](#) is handled by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The application for your EIN can be made entirely online using the online form. Your bank is your choice. However, any bank or credit union will require a Social Security Number, [Individual Tax Identification Number](#) (for resident aliens, non-US citizens ineligible for a social security number), or Employer Identification Number to open your account.

## **Finance and the Business Plan Overview**

### ***Why is Financial Planning Important?***

Professional and well-organized financial planning will present a positive image of the business you intend to grow. For a new business venture to be successful, it must have the support of the community and local government. A professional business plan will improve the chance of achieving community support.

Securing financial assistance is one form of support that may be necessary to establish a new business. A strong business plan is critical to securing this support. Loan officers prefer to approve potential applicants with financial plans that anticipate possible liabilities. Liabilities are the debts or other things that your business owes. Lenders are more likely to trust applicants who plan carefully and responsibly.

Even if you are not seeking financial assistance, a financial plan will be helpful in safeguarding your investment. By planning for potential costs, you will be more prepared to avoid financial losses.

### ***What Should the Financial Section of the Business Plan Include?***

The financial section should include accurate expectations of cost for every step toward establishing the new business. [\*The Entrepreneur's Guide: Starting and Growing a Business in Pennsylvania\*](#) (2019) suggests that financial planning should include:

- Startup costs (one-time expenses).
- Monthly expenses (repetitive costs).
- Sources and uses of funding.
- Balance sheets (initial and projected up to three years).
- Projected cash flow (monthly for the first year and quarterly for years two and three).
- Profit and cost forecasts (annually for three years).
- Break-even analysis (when do you expect to profit?).
- Three prior years of statements for your current business (if applicable).
- Personal financial statement of the owner or owners.
- Assumptions used in financial projections.

Lenders will consider several factors to determine the risk involved in financing a new business. They will consider the applicant's management background and how the applicant's experience will affect the business. Lenders will consider an applicant's ability to repay the loan based on a realistic projection of income. Credit history also contributes to the loan application process. A history of timely payments will benefit a loan applicant. Adequate collateral (assets you must have to back up the loan that can be seized if you do not pay) may also contribute to the loan application process. One theme that is apparent in financial planning is organization. Even if you are not seeking a loan, good organizational practices will benefit your business.

### ***Further Reading on Business Planning***

For more support on how to turn your idea into a business, plan, name, register, operate, and grow your business, please see the

- [Pennsylvania Business One-Stop Shop](#)
- [The Pennsylvania Small Business Development Centers Agribusiness Assistance](#)
- [Pennsylvania Small Business Development Centers Locations](#)

## **Finance and Business Strategies**

### ***Business Strategy #1: Plan for the Unexpected***

Some additional considerations concerning the process of starting a business include planning for unexpected costs, developing strong responses to theoretical problems, and understanding the impact of loans.

In developing a successful business, contingency plans are a good way to be more confident about risks. A contingency plan is a backup plan ready for immediate implementation when

projections prove inaccurate due to unanticipated events, such as a troubled economy, abnormally bad weather, or a shift in demand. Creating a list of potential problems with possible solutions will provide a plan of action for maintaining business security under challenging situations. Contingency plans strengthen personal crisis management systems. Success is sometimes measured by avoided loss or damage control, more than by profit achievement.

Additionally, you can benefit by establishing a potential support channel network for difficult situations. Think about where you can find good advice or emergency financial assistance as part of your plan for the unexpected. Developing relationships with lenders or other businesses could provide possible venues for assistance with unanticipated problems.

One common reason that businesses fail is the lack of funding. This commonality is because many new entrepreneurs have inaccurately estimated the cost associated with starting a new business. This inaccuracy may indicate that new business operators should not assume the following:

- The prices of business-related goods and services will not increase; the opposite is more likely in every industry.
- The buying power of business capital will remain strong; higher inflation means that each dollar buys less.
- That sales will remain steady; predict future income cautiously.

### ***Business Strategy #2: Manage Risk***

One method for anticipating risks to your new business is to perform periodic operational risk assessments. An operational risk assessment (Adaptive Leadership Systems, LLC. & Randy1, 2008) includes the following steps:

1. **Identify the threats:** List any potential threats to the operation of the new business. For example, failure to file taxes may pose a threat to business.
2. **Develop loss statements:** Identify the negative consequences of each threat listed in step 1. For example, failure to file taxes may result in prosecution.
3. **Assess the risks:** For the identified negative consequences, determine the probability of using a number scale. For example, if it seems very likely that prosecution may occur from a failure to file taxes, rate the threat probability high, such as 5 on a 1 to 5 scale. The severity of damage must also be estimated. For example, the prosecution would require legal defense and many other fees that may be a heavy expense to the business. In this case, the severity of damage would rate very high, perhaps at 4 or 5. The worst possible risk level would be an occurrence probability of 5 and a damage severity of 5.

4. **Identify risk reduction actions:** For each risk, identify actions that you can take to reduce the risk. For failure to file taxes, you could decide to take action by filing, thus reducing your risk significantly. You could also hire a tax professional to manage your taxes for you. Possible actions do not necessarily need to be feasible. There may be situations where filing taxes are not necessary (though probably uncommon), in which case, the risk of severe damage would be considerably lower.
5. In the final step, you choose the best action based on your assessment. You may not be able to eliminate the threat, but risk reduction is sometimes enough to secure survival.

The risk management process helps to provide a visual map of actions and consequences before mistakes occur. Ultimately, the success or failure of a new business will depend on the owner's ability to make the best decisions. A business owner can effectively reduce catastrophic loss by anticipating risks, increasing the probability of a successful business venture.

### **Understanding: Competition and Marketing**

Before new entrepreneurs invest in a new business, they must have a thorough knowledge of competition in the market. [Competition](#) is a term that refers to a rivalry between businesses seeking to secure customers' patronage in a particular market. For agritourism, identifying competitors will depend on the products and services offered by a business. Agritourism competitors could be any business that draws customers away from the agritourism operation by offering similar products or services.

These competitors are not necessarily agritourism operations. A new store that offers very low prices on some of the products offered at an agritourism business could potentially draw many customers as a competitor. The importance of the business plan re-emerges in this instance. Effectively managing your business will require full and extensive knowledge of the available products. Further, new entrepreneurs must find new and innovative ways to reduce costs to compete with businesses that may be more financially established.

It is important to note that competing businesses can draw customers away from your current or potential business. This effect is also the case when additional businesses emerge in your area of operation. In the study of tourism, the term "displacement effect" refers to a substitution of demand from other facilities that redirect demand to similar facilities (Fletcher et al., 2017). When the displacement effect is present, no new demand is generated (Fletcher et al., 2017). If there is a greater supply of a product than there is demand, then price reduction must occur to secure sales in a market of limited consumer availability.

A stratified approach to assessing the market may be appropriate in developing a competitive strategy. The new entrepreneur will face competition at the local, regional, and global levels.

It may seem intimidating to imagine yourself as a global competitor, but all businesses can compete in the global market in the technological age. The internet is a top resource used by visitors to find agritourism providers. Agritourism operators can more effectively market with a presence on the internet, where most potential visitors seek information about agritourism activities. Internet marketing achieves the global aspect of a stratified marketing approach. Internet marketing can also promote a business at the regional and local levels, which is why we will talk about using the internet more fully in [Part Three](#) of the book.

### ***Which Price is Right?***

Establishing appropriate prices for a new business can be confusing at times. Setting prices too high is likely to encourage customers to visit competing businesses. Setting prices too low could hurt profits and repel customers seeking quality. If initial prices are set too low, customers who initially visit your business will likely seek lower prices at other businesses as your prices adjust to market levels. A good pricing strategy includes researching the prices of the product at competing businesses and then setting a price for the product that falls somewhere in the middle of the price range. Market prices change periodically, so it may be beneficial to assess pricing on a routine basis.

### ***Understanding Debt***

Understanding debt will help you avoid financial problems while also taking advantage of different borrowing options. The Pennsylvania [Entrepreneur's Guide](#) explains,

“It often takes time to build sales levels, yet rent, utilities, and other costs are immediate. During this time, when bills are often arriving faster than the customers, cash reserves can help the business survive.” (2019, p. 22).

When your initial funding is insufficient, the traditional sources of financing are banks, local, state, and federal agencies, angel investors, and venture capital firms (DCED, 2019). Assuming debt or additional debt is an extensive topic that should be discussed with a financial professional or one of the many sources of professional expertise mentioned in this book, such as the [Small Business Development Center](#) nearest to you.

### ***Cost Containment***

Accomplishing cost [containment](#) might involve many different management strategies. One way to manage cost is to start the business at home (Zahn, 2007). Some agritourism operations will remain “at home” enterprises, while others may require a separate location. Starting the initial business at home will effectively reduce rental or mortgage costs. With this method, a new business owner can take a slow, systematic approach to develop the business.

Another way to reduce cost is by judging the output of a resource instead of its condition. This approach is particularly applicable when considering technology. New computers are being developed all of the time. Buying a new computer for the business should not occur until you are certain that older computer equipment cannot effectively achieve the necessary output

your business requires. Resist the temptation to purchase new items that you do not really need. If upgrading equipment does not produce a benefit that exceeds its cost, then seriously consider the practical approach; judge equipment by its ability to perform a function for the business.

Budgeting is another way to manage costs. Do not compete with other businesses dollar-for-dollar. Spend efficiently by selecting the best prices for advertising, packaging, or other items (Zahn, 2007). Successful spending will produce an increase in sales. Overzealous spending on advertising that does not help attract customers or respect the budget is poor practice for cost containment.

Additionally, it may be beneficial to purchase items as needed. This approach is not suggesting the exhaustion of your inventory. The point is to purchase assets at appropriate intervals. Start-up may not be a good time to purchase a large item that will not be used until much later in the business's life (Zahn, 2007). Consider the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing assets in this category at startup.

Cost management can include bartering services with other business owners (Zahn, 2007). This can be advantageous because it does not require cash, and it accomplishes a goal. While these opportunities may be uncommon, understand that this business method has advantages as a business tactic under certain circumstances.

A valuable tip for approaching all purchasing decisions is to label each potential purchase as a "want" or a "need" (Zahn, 2007). "Wants" that do not benefit your operation will inflate your operation costs. "Needs" directly benefit a business operation in either the short-term or the long-term. Avoid unnecessary costs by adhering to a need-based [cost-containment](#) policy.

## **Finance and Tax: The Basics**

This section discusses finance and taxes by providing a general description of the tax responsibilities for a new business. The tax information in this section does not cover all available tax literature. We provide other more technical resources to help in the section labeled *additional recommended reading*.

Tax liabilities vary for different types of business organizations. Business taxes for a corporation are considerably more complex than taxes for a sole proprietorship. Thus, the form of business you operate will determine which taxes you must submit. Due to the potential complexity of business taxes, you should seek the professional counsel of a tax advisor concerning the business startup process.

Federal business taxes take four different forms: income tax, self-employment tax, employment tax, and excise tax (Internal Revenue Service [IRS]). While there are various state business taxes, this section will only cover Pennsylvania tax.

### ***Income Tax***

Income tax is the yearly tax familiar to most workers in the United States. Taxes are usually collected, or withheld, from income throughout the year, and any remaining obligation is paid at the end of the tax year. If withholding results in an overpayment, then the taxpayer will receive a tax refund. Withholding is not always a requirement, as individuals may sometimes choose to pay all taxes at the end of the tax year instead of having income withheld. Withholding may be required for your business. Seek the advice of a professional for more information.

### ***Self-Employment Tax***

Self-employment tax is the combination of social security and Medicare taxes (IRS). Self-employment tax payments contribute to your coverage under the social security system. Social security is intended to provide you with retirement benefits, disability benefits, survivor benefits, and hospital Medicare benefits.

### ***Employment Tax***

If you have employees in your business, then you will be required to pay social security, Medicare, and federal unemployment taxes (FUTA) for each employee (IRS, 2021). You will also be required to perform federal income tax withholding for each employee. For additional information, refer to [Employment Taxes for Small Businesses](#) from the Internal Revenue Service. If you opened your business bank account using an [EIN](#), this is the number you will use to set up your tax collection.

### ***Excise Tax***

[Excise taxes](#) generally apply to businesses that work with certain materials or perform certain functions. Excise tax categories include environmental taxes, communication, and air transportation taxes, fuel taxes, retail taxes, ship passenger taxes, manufacturer taxes, foreign insurance taxes, and taxes for various fishing and marine transportation equipment (IRS, 2021). Other categories include a wagering excise tax for gambling operations and an excise tax for vehicles weighing over 55,000 pounds. Seek the advice of a professional if you think your business might be required to pay an excise tax.

### ***Sales Tax***

Sales tax guidelines vary by state. The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue (2021) provides the following guidelines concerning Pennsylvania sales tax:

*“The sales and [use tax](#) is imposed on the retail sale, consumption, rental, or use of tangible personal property, including [digital products](#) in Pennsylvania. The tax is also imposed on certain services relating to such property and on the charge for specific business services. Major items exempt from the tax include food (not ready-to-eat); candy and gum; most clothing; textbooks; computer services; pharmaceutical drugs; sales for resale; and residential heating fuels such as oil,*

electricity, gas, coal, and firewood.” ([Pennsylvania Department of Revenue, 2021](#))

In 2021, the Pennsylvania sales tax rate is 6 percent for non-exempt items. *“The Pennsylvania sales tax rate is 6 percent. By law, a 1 percent local tax is added to purchases made in Allegheny County, and 2 percent local tax is added to purchases made in Philadelphia.”* (Pennsylvania Department of Revenue, 2021).

For more information on Pennsylvania taxes, refer to the [Pennsylvania Department of Revenue](#).

### ***Tax Advice***

Unless you have experience with business taxes, it is highly recommended that you seek the consultation of a business professional. Tax procedures can be complex and can potentially result in unnecessary fees. You can avoid mistakes and fees by getting the right information from professionals with business tax experience.

### ***Additional Recommended Tax Resources and Reading***

The IRS [website](#) has information specific to small farms and agricultural operations. Non-agricultural general business tax information is also available on the IRS website.

The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue offers several helpful publications:

- [Starting a Small Business in Pennsylvania A Guide to Pennsylvania Taxes 2020](#)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Revenue Tax information for Farmers 2019](#)
- [Internal Revenue Service Farmer’s Tax Guide 2020](#)

Or visit the [Small Business Development Centers](#) for free business startup and support services.

## **Human Resources: Your Employees**

Unlike traditional products, tourism consists mainly of services and experiences. As such, people power is especially important to the success of an agritourism operation. Sometimes the operating labor is called human resources or human capital. Just like any resource, successful management of employees requires careful planning.

Human resources may consist of just you and your immediate or extended family, depending on your goals. Family members are sometimes volunteer or unpaid labor, but they can also be paid employees. As you develop and grow, you may need to hire a team of people outside of the family. You will need to decide what human resource structure (unpaid or paid) will be cost-competitive for your business. Nonetheless, the management of human resources requires the consideration of the following activities about your potential employees or personnel:

- Recruitment and selection.
- Retention.

- Training and development.
- Evaluation of performance.
- Performance reward or discipline.

Remember, when first starting, it may be necessary to do everything yourself. However, remember that your primary function must be directing the business. Do not make the mistake of trying to do everything yourself when there are employees available to help you.

### ***Recruitment and Selection***

The unique nature of the tourism industry makes human resources especially vital. This nature also makes human resource management especially challenging. Tourism has traditionally struggled with perceptions about employment opportunities in the industry.

These difficulties can make the recruitment of people a challenge. In addition, some recruitment resources can be costly. One of the best ways to recruit employees is through referrals. Employees might tell their friends or family about the great job they have at your business, encouraging others to apply. Referrals are effective because friends and family trust the source of information. To accomplish a system of referral recruitment, you must first create a high-quality work environment that your employees will want to discuss with their friends.

Make sure to circulate information that includes a clear job description, application requirements, and contact information. Be very clear on requirements for work hours, skills, and the anticipated pay rate. In addition, it is vital to clarify job benefits and length of employment (part-time, full-time, or seasonal). Make sure that the job announcement talks about the things that make you a great employer.

Some ways to recruit potential employees include:

- Referrals through a personal network of contacts (Family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues).
- A community bulletin board at a local market, community center, place of worship, club, post office, or another agri-business.
- Local job fairs.
- A local college, university, or high school.
- Local social media user groups.
- Online job boards.

You may also want to contact the [Commonwealth Workforce Development](#) System's Pennsylvania [Careerlink](#) for cost-free resources to recruit potential employees.

After advertising the available positions, think about how you will select the best employees for the job. An application is a necessary part of your recruitment process. The applicant should give basic information like personal contacts, work history, education, and references at the

point of application. Ensure that the application process is the same for every applicant so that it is easier to compare prospective employees.

Next is meeting the applicants face-to-face in an interview, either in person or via video conferencing like Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime if you are comfortable meeting this way. This meeting will give you a sense of the applicant's people skills and help determine if they are right for your business.

When it is time for the interview, focus on questions that pertain to your business and the candidate's relevant skills. Some questions are illegal to ask, such as race, religion, age, disability, family, or marital status. Remember to follow up on references to gain a better understanding of the applicant.

Whether you hire or not, keep a file of each applicant. You may need to hire in the future. You can also share information with other business managers who might be hiring. This helpful information sharing is a good way to network with other employers. Other business owners will be much more likely to help you if you help them when they are in need. Developing good business relationships should always be a top priority.

### ***Retention***

After hiring an employee, it is essential to keep that employee functioning at his or her best. Agritourism businesses rely on management's ability to develop enjoyable locations for both employees and visitors. Employees want to work for an employer who values good morale, motivation, and interest in improving the quality of the workplace. A good starting point is fair employee salaries and job benefits. Other good management practices include:

- Consistent performance feedback and praise.
- Recognition of excellence.
- Employee involvement in business decisions; and,
- Good communication – be an employer who delegates, motivates, and listens.

You can further enhance your business by providing a workplace that is healthy and safe. Healthy human capital makes for a healthy business.

Other areas where employees need protection include:

- Illegal discrimination, and,
- Violations of privacy, disability, or other legal rights.

Additional legal considerations may apply to hiring workers under the age of 18 and immigrant workers. You can obtain more information by contacting [the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry](#).

## **Churn**

[Churn](#) can refer to customers or employees. Churn rate is a measure of the number of individuals or items moving out of a collective group over a specific period. Employee churn can be called employee turnover. Employees churn or turnover by leaving their positions. Customer churn means that customers stop doing business with you.

Either way, churn means that your customers or employees do not feel attached to your business. Both types of churn are not good for business. Ideally, you want to retain good employees and good customers. That way you do not need to spend money to re-attract them. For employee churn, you spend money and time on re-recruitment, re-hiring, and re-training. When you have a good employee, you should invest in retaining them through good management and training practices.

## **Management and Training**

Another way to support employees and avoid churn is through training and development. Employees need more than initial training only. When employers provide development training, they communicate that the employees are worth training time and money. The new skills acquired from the training are also a benefit. You can provide the training, or you might choose to collaborate with other businesses for training.

If possible, it is a good idea to rotate employees between different workplace tasks. Employees appreciate work that is not the same mechanical process every single day. This rotation can benefit the business by allowing different employees to gain experience in different areas of the operation. As employees gain operational knowledge, they will gain the power to make a business operate better. If employees have the opportunity to grow and develop while working, they will remain positive, reflecting a good image for you and your business.

Management of your business will determine the quality of the work environment. Workplace quality is important to businesses because the environment will influence the attitudes that employees have while working. When employees are happy, they are better at making customers happy. There are a few things that you can do to make sure that the work environment is a positive one. Consider the following:

1. **Workplace safety.** Are you providing a safe environment? Workplace safety is more than a recommendation; it is required. Check the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (also known as OSHA) [website](#) for more information on workplace safety practices.
2. **Develop a strong sense of trust with your employees.** If you tell your employees that you are going to do something, do it. A common cause of workplace resentment is a lack of trust between employees and management. Employers expect their workers to be honest and loyal. It is even more important for management to be trustworthy because employees look to management as the model for appropriate work behavior. If you

must violate an employee's trust, it is your responsibility to explain that you had to change your plan and the reasons for it. There is no asset more important than your employees, and there is no better way to gain their respect than by being a trustworthy, honest, and respectable manager.

3. **Know your people and try to help them become successful.** If you support the well-being of your workers, they will be much more willing to go the extra mile for you.
4. **Include your workers in meetings.** By having closed meetings and keeping management separate from workers, companies sometimes create an atmosphere that can divide a business. Make sure that you include all of your workers as members of your business team. Remove the mutual ignorance and the resulting distrust by including workers in meetings that involve work practices. You might be surprised to find that your workers know a lot about your business and that they have ideas that you had not thought to consider.
5. **Remember that your actions represent you.** That is, your actions convey a message to your workers just as much as your words do. Providing good training can communicate a strong message to your workers. Your consistency in enforcing policies will definitely communicate with your employees. For example, if you choose not to enforce a policy with one specific employee, but you always enforce the policy with other employees, you communicate favoritism to the entire workforce (even to the favored employee). Think about your actions before making choices, and carefully consider the message you are sending to workers.
6. **Lead by example.** If workers see you perform a task incorrectly, they will assume it is an acceptable way to conduct business. Set strong positive examples for your employees in everything that you do.
7. **Long hours reduce employee performance.** As employees become more fatigued from working, their ability to perform well at work decreases. Fatigued workers make more mistakes and deliver poorer customer service. Be vigilant when monitoring the number of hours your employees have been working. Rested workers are better able to achieve positive interactions with customers.

### ***Performance Evaluations and Disciplinary Action***

Creating a culture of feedback is important for all employees. This culture should include regular performance evaluations. Evaluations are like a report card that includes noticing good and bad performance.

Performance evaluation includes six main components:

1. The employee must understand what is required of them when they start the job.
2. The employee must have the necessary training required to perform the job correctly.

3. A qualified person must critically evaluate and document the performance of the employee. These evaluations should occur at regular intervals (every month, six months, annually, etc.).
4. The employee must receive a counseling session that explains what they need to improve and gives advice on improving it.
5. Allow sufficient time for the employee to improve before re-evaluation.
6. Good performance should be equally recognized with poor performance.
7. A re-evaluation must occur as scheduled.

If necessary, a disciplinary evaluation should follow the same format as a general evaluation and explain the consequences for repeated inappropriate conduct.

The job interview has a role in the disciplinary process. Job interviews evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of potential employees. Assessing a potential employee's behavioral skills during the interview process is an important step in preventing disciplinary problems associated with insufficient behavioral maturity.

Most jobs require that employees can work well with others. One way to estimate emotional stability is by estimating the employee's ability to exercise control over his or her emotions. Poorly developed emotional control in anger management, communication, or anxiety management could make it very difficult for an employee to function in certain positions of responsibility, so you must evaluate emotional stability for the job requirements in all of its aspects. By recruiting emotionally functional applicants, you may reduce the need for disciplinary action in your business.

Disciplinary action of an employee should always occur in a private setting where only the employee and disciplining manager can hear the conversation. It may be good to have another member of the management team present for support in some cases. The point of disciplinary counseling is to correct the employee and return them to work as a functional team member. By disciplining an employee in front of other team members, you will make it more difficult for them to return to the job with a positive attitude. It is much more professional to discipline employees in a private setting.

A disciplinary meeting should include the following components:

1. Document the entire disciplinary process for future reference. Sometimes remembering events from a few months ago can be a challenge. Keep disciplinary documents in the employee's personnel file or another organized and secure location.
2. Explain what happened. Make sure that the facts are clear.
3. Explain why the employee's part in the event was not acceptable.
4. Explain what would have been acceptable and what you expect of the employee in the future. It is helpful to provide the employee with suggestions for improvement.
5. Explain what will happen if the infraction occurs again.

It is vital that to follow through with stated consequences for future infractions. If you promise that a repeat infraction will result in the employee leaving work early, you must require them to leave early for a repeat infraction. Remember, empty promises encourage workers to break the rules because there are no consequences to discourage breaking them.

If a performance deficiency is skill-oriented, it may be more appropriate to move the employee to another task instead of sending them home. Choose consequences that fit the infraction and benefit the functioning of the business. Consequences can range from a verbal warning to employment termination. Fairness matters if you intend to safeguard the integrity of the team. Make sure that you can keep the promises that you make in every circumstance. If you cannot keep a promise, then it is better not to make the promise in the first place.

### ***Reward Exceptional Performance***

If you are going to correct poor performance, then you must reward exceptional performance. Rewards are another way that you communicate with your employees. Rewarding exceptional performance is a much more positive management practice than one that only corrects deficiencies. Rewards show that you value your employees. Rewards provide incentives for workers, encouraging them to become better at their jobs.

There are many ways to reward employees. You will need to decide how you can reward your employees based on your specific business.

Verbal recognition is a simple way that you might reward your workers for good performance. The value of verbal appreciation is often underestimated. Most employees want to be good at what they do. If you are an honest and respectable manager, employees will respect you. Appreciation from a respected leader can be a great reward.

### ***Further reading on human resources:***

- PA Business One-Stop Shop [Hiring workers in Pennsylvania](#)
- Pennsylvania [New Hire Reporting Requirements](#)
- Pennsylvania [Wage and Hour Laws and Regulations](#)

### **Federal Resources**

- [Fair Labor Standards Act](#)
- [Immigration Laws and Regulations for Farm Labor](#)

## **Zoning: Understanding Regulations and Your Land**

Now that we have spent some time discussing your financial and human assets, let's talk about the stage for your farm-based business – your land.

## What is Zoning?

[Zoning](#) is a system that regulates land development within a community. Its policies describe how the land can and cannot be used. Zoning laws regulate land uses. Zoning can apply to many things to develop your agritourism business, such as roadside signage, parking, hours of operation, noise, lighting, structures and outbuildings, on-property events, and traffic management.

Land development policies can be a crucial determinant in the business start-up process. The presence of such policies is, therefore, a definite concern for the aspiring agritourism operator. Often land-use regulations can be a limiting factor in the development or maintenance of land-use regulations.

### *Who makes the zoning rules?*

Responsibility for zoning occurs at several different levels of government. The most influential level for the aspiring agritourism operator is the local governing body. The rules made at the local level are called [ordinances](#).

Beyond the local level, county planning commissions also regulate the municipalities in their area. Counties will mandate [code](#) to be observed in the absence of a local code or give specific power to the municipalities they oversee.

Above the county level is the state level. The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development maintains state zoning regulations (General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania [GACP], 1968). The state provides guidelines for developing zoning ordinances to mandate appropriate zoning practices for county and local governments.

There may be circumstances where your proposed activity is not compatible with local land use or building codes. Your municipality may be open to an exception as a conditional use permit, variance, or non-conforming use. These permits grant an exception to the landowner to use the property reasonably for a set amount of time or conditions.

### *Why is Zoning Important?*

A commonly stated purpose for zoning is to protect the rights of landowners from imposing activities on other landowners and to promote the safety, health, and welfare of citizens and the general public (GACP, 1968). Furthermore, zoning aims to:

- Promote organized community growth.
- Maintain health, welfare, and safety of the public.
- Guide the use of land and building of structures.
- Promote energy conservation using planning practices.
- Protect prime agricultural land, natural resources, and historic land.
- Protect agricultural operations without impeding the need for future growth.

### ***Local Registrations, Permits, Zoning Look Up***

The PA Business One-Stop offers a handy look-up tool for registrations, permits, and zoning based on address. To determine your local municipal contact for local registrations, permits, and zoning, visit the [Pennsylvania Municipal Statistics Contact Search](#).

There are several critical protections for Pennsylvania farmers: the foundation for most local law, the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code and the Pennsylvania Right to Farm Act. Keep in mind that several protections under the law were designed to protect agricultural land from urban sprawl and not the other way around. Here are some critical highlights of these protections:

### ***Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code***

The [Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code](#) specifically ensures your right to grow your farm-based business

*“To ensure that municipalities enact zoning ordinances that facilitate the present and future economic viability of existing agricultural operations in this Commonwealth and do not prevent or impede the owner or operator’s need to change or expand their operations in the future in order to remain viable.”*  
(GACP, 1968, p.1)

The Municipalities Planning Code is a standard for local and county-level zoning. Although state guidelines give direct advice concerning the development of zoning codes, local governments have the power to establish codes specific to the needs of their community.

### ***Pennsylvania’s Right to Farm Act***

Pennsylvania’s Right to Farm [law](#) requires *“direct commercial sales by a landowner who owns and operates the property and produces not less than 50 percent of the commodities sold be permitted by right.”* (1998). This act includes language on protection from nuisance suits and ordinances, which means complaints against you by individuals or a local authority that are frivolous or unnecessary.

### ***Other Protection: Agricultural Security Areas***

[Agricultural Security Areas](#) are a tool for protecting our farms and farmland from non-agricultural uses (Agriculture.pa.gov, 2021). Filing for an ASA can protect farmland from nuisance suits, ordinances, and condemnation by state and local agencies.

### ***Why is Zoning Important to My Business Plan?***

Zoning keeps your business running well and makes sure you are compliant with the rules of your community. Here are some of the reasons that zoning is important to your business.

### ***Avoid Unnecessary Fines***

Problems with zoning can cost both time and money. Not following codes can leave you open to getting fines. It is best to assume a proactive perspective with zoning. Prevention is the key to success when addressing the zoning issue. Understanding the potential for problems in this area of business development can help make the process more manageable.

### ***Keeps Peace within the Community***

One of the purposes of zoning is to protect other landowners in the community, which is an opportunity to gain support for your business. If your proposed business could affect neighboring landowners, it might be a good idea to discuss your plans with them to gain their support. If any zoning issues arise, you will have more people to speak on your behalf at a zoning board hearing.

### ***Prevents Unexpected Problems***

An important strategy in business planning is crisis prevention. When starting out, resources are limited, and it is best to run the most efficient operation possible. A part of this is anticipating any problems that might damage the integrity of the new operation. Time is a key factor that relates to zoning and general business practices. When a zoning board takes action, it is important to respond immediately to avoid multiple fines.

It is possible to recover lost money, but you cannot recover lost time. Keeping business priorities organized will prevent unnecessary losses of both time and money. The next section describes several positive actions to help deal with zoning issues.

### ***How to Avoid Problems with Zoning***

#### ***Understand How the New Operation Uses the Land***

Essentially this means that you need a complete understanding of how your operation will work. A zoning officer could have questions concerning the ways that your new operation will use the land. Presenting a strong concept of the new business will strengthen your position.

#### ***Contact Your Local Zoning Office for Additional Information***

The zoning office is the authority on any zoning concerns within your municipality. If zoning issues arise with your new business, the zoning office will be responsible for initiating corrective action. Contact the zoning office for advice concerning the implementation of your agritourism business plan. A zoning office is usually composed of a zoning hearing board, a zoning officer, and sometimes a zoning solicitor. The zoning office enforces guidelines set by the zoning ordinance for the municipality. Therefore, as the enforcing body, the zoning office is a good place to find information on zoning for your local area.

#### ***Know When to Consult an Attorney***

A step toward business success is access to the right information. Attorneys have years of training in various fields of law. They can help you to understand the complex issues associated

with zoning. An attorney with experience in real estate law or tax law is likely to have a strong understanding of zoning issues. Some lawyers deal specifically with zoning. Investing time in finding the right attorney is a good strategy that can save your business from financially devastating mistakes.

### ***Additional Recommended Zoning Resources and Reading***

#### **Pennsylvania Local Government Commission [The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code \(MPC\)](#)**

This document, established in 1968, outlines the process of community planning in detail. If you want a direct source of zoning information, this is it. It is written in the language of the law, but this 103-page document leaves out very little in terms of zoning throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

#### **Pennsylvania Governor's Center for Local Government Services [Planning for Agriculture](#)**

This document summarizes several fundamental rights and protections that you have as a farmer:

- ACRE/Act 38 of 2005 (Local Regulation of Normal Agricultural Operations)
- Agricultural Area Security Law (AASL)
- Agricultural Conservation Easements/ Farmland Preservation
- Pennsylvania Clean and Green Program (Tax Incentive Program)
- State and Local Environmental Regulation of Agriculture
- The Act Protecting Agricultural Operations from Nuisance Suits and Ordinances
- The Pennsylvania Right to Farm Act

Use this document to understand the limitation on the power of local regulations, protections granted, eligibility requirements, and exceptions.

### ***WeConservePA***

This organization was formerly the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association. WeConservePA consists of land trusts, watershed associations, environmental advisory councils, agricultural land preservation boards, trail groups, and conservation districts.

WeConservePA is made up of 75 of Pennsylvania's most active conservation organizations. They have assembled several documents and tools in one place as a repository to help with many types of land-based business decisions. Topics include land use, easements, financing, and land stewardship. Access their whole library using their online service called [Conservation Tools](#).

As you navigate, you will notice the search box in the top right of the screen. Use this for keywords like agriculture, agritourism, agribusiness, and farming. Alternatively, use the tabs on the left menu of the screen to locate tools, model documents, research, guides, maps, and experts at different topics, including Pennsylvania Agricultural Security Areas, conservation easements, and farmland zoning.

## Safety and Liability Issues

There are many state agencies and commissions involved in regulating agritourism activities. This section will highlight some of the most pressing regulatory and legal issues that may affect your business. However, the list of resources in Part Four of this manual specifically emphasizes agencies that regulate common agritourism activities.

### *Safety and Spread of Disease*

Safety is important for your workforce and for your visitors. It can contribute to avoiding churn, save you from lawsuits, and improve your guests' experience.

While you may be reading this publication long after the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, many of the health and safety expectations will remain the same. Visitors to your farm will still expect a high degree of sanitation. Other guests will have adjusted to and now expect contactless options. For example, using mobile payment apps will be more widespread because this restricted contact to reduce the spreading of germs during the pandemic.

The pandemic has created some new revenue stream opportunities but also solidified some practices that guests will expect. Some examples that are still important, even as guidelines relax, are:

- Let your customers know what you expect and how you are minimizing their risk,
- Rearrange outdoor seating to allow for distancing.
- Timed access or encourage reservations.
- Reduce cash handling. Check out the section of the book on [mobile payments](#).
- Arrange for online orders, drive-thru, or curbside pick-up.

The [CDC's website](#) has a specialized area about health and safety specific to COVID-19 concerns.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture lists special considerations for Pennsylvania farmers on its [website](#).

### *Accessibility for Guests*

Another important protection for your visitors that is essential for you to comply is the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). This legislation protects the rights of those with disabilities. There are no specific parts of the act for agritourism operations. However, part of being in a service sector business like agritourism is making sure all of your guests feel welcome.

Remaining compliant means that you make reasonable accommodations for your guests with disabilities. Disabilities can include different physical and mental challenges that limit daily life

(ADA, 2021). Reasonable accommodations can include things like pathways and ramps for those with mobility challenges.

Also, remember that businesses must always welcome [service animals](#) as long as it does not compromise the welfare of your animals. Service animals are highly trained and are not pets. Emotional support animals are not protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, service animals are.

- Service animals are usually dogs but can also be:
  - Capuchin monkeys
  - Ferrets
  - Pygmy goats
  - Miniature horses
  - Potbelly pigs
- These animals provide services such as
  - Guiding the blind or vision impaired.
  - Alerting the deaf or hearing impaired.
  - Pulling wheelchairs
  - Seizure response
  - Retrieving objects.

Service animals may also provide psychological support. This support is not the same as an emotional support or companion animal. Psychiatric service animals are still considered service animals. These animals might:

- Provide a task or service for an individual with a psychiatric disability.
- Calm a panic attack or soothe those with autism.
- Remind about medication.
- Assist those with PTSD.
- Interrupt compulsive or destructive behaviors.

An example of a non-traditional service animal is a miniature horse. Miniature horse service animals might seem unusual – even on a farm. Miniature horses are becoming a more popular option since they can do many of the same tasks as service dogs. However, their life spans are longer, and, therefore, the handler does not have to go through the loss and retraining of another animal. Also, they are sturdier and more capable of pulling wheelchairs than dogs of the same size.

You may have concerns about a service animal interacting with the animals you have on your farm. In this case, you do have some rights to limit the service animal. According to the Department of Justice

*“Service animals can be restricted from areas where the animals on display are the natural prey or natural predators of dogs, where the presence of a dog would be*

*disruptive, causing the displayed animals to behave aggressively or become agitated. They cannot be restricted from other areas.” (AgriAbility, 2021)*

Handlers do have other responsibilities when accompanied by their animal. However, you do not have a right to ask them to prove they are disabled or that their animal is specially trained. The handler does not have to produce a certificate for their service animal. Some service animals are not professionally trained, as it is the handler’s right to train the animal themselves. However, you should not have to ask for the certification because the animal's behavior will be apparent.

However, remember, service animals must be:

- Under control at all times, this does not necessarily mean on a leash or harness.
- Housebroken (trained to meet their toileting needs).
- May not pose a direct threat to health or safety to your guests, employees, or other animals.
- Your facility can accommodate the animal's height, weight, and overall size.

If the handler does not correct the behavior, you may ask the handler to remove the animal. However, if the guest returns without the animal, you must still provide access & services to the person.

It is also considerate to ask the guest if there is anything that you can do to make them feel comfortable or increase their accessibility. This effort includes being courteous of their animal, but you are not responsible for providing food, water, or toileting areas for the animal. Also, on your property or anywhere you encounter a service animal, remember, these are not pets. Do not touch, coax, or distract a service animal. Help them stay focused on the needs of their disabled companion.

***More reading on this topic:***

**U.S. Access Board** – This federal agency promotes equitable access for people with disabilities. These two design guides apply to many agritourism activities.

- [Standards for Outdoor Developed Areas](#)
- [Requirements for Recreation Facilities in the ADA](#)

**ADA National Network: [adata.org](http://adata.org)** – This is a network of ADA compliance information, guidance, and training. This guide is helpful for any events you might host.

- [A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities](#)

**Americans with Disabilities Act** – The Small Business Development Association prepared this guide for guidance on ADA compliance.

- For more help, please see the [ADA Guide for Small Business](#)

**AgriAbility** – This is a national program that provides resources and technical assistance with making agricultural spaces and activities more accessible. It has many ideas and practical advice that might not be covered in the guides above.

- For more help with ideas and resources for making your farm more accessible, you may want to visit [AgriAbility](#).

### ***Animal Welfare***

If you have animals as part of your agritourism activities, your operation may be subject to the specifications of the [Animal Welfare Act](#). This legislation protects your animals and guests and helps your farm educate the public about animal care.

In addition, Pennsylvania passed a comprehensive [animal protection law \(Act 10\) in 2017](#). Interactions with animals can be risks for physical harm and the spread of animal diseases. As such, the extent of animal activities and interaction on your farm is also important to specify with your insurance provider. For more information on regulations under the Animal Welfare Acts, you can visit the [USDA](#).

### ***Building Codes***

Zoning regulated the use of land, and building code regulates the structures. Pennsylvania has a statewide building code called the [Uniform Construction Code](#) (UCC). Not every municipality follows the code, but most do.

Typically, the municipality is responsible for code enforcement and permit applications. The municipal website will have your permit application and your building inspector's contact information. It is best to start to work with the building inspector from the start of your project for new construction or expansion of existing facilities. This will save you from making costly mistakes.

Keeping your guests, property, and employees safe also requires adherence to state fire regulations. The regulations apply to the built structures on your property and how you fill them with guests. The number of people in the structure is called occupancy. The size and purpose of your structure will determine the occupancy.

When you get your certificate of occupancy, then your structure is considered “certified.” Meeting the certification standards will also ensure that you meet fire and accessibility standards for the building. Occupancy can be found via the [Department of Labor and Industry](#).

### ***Food Safety***

If you provide food as part of your agritourism operation, special health and safety considerations apply. There are different rules for serving food on your property or offering food for purchase. This service will vary by type of food and ingredients. Things with food service start to get trickier when there is the temperature control of the items, whether it be hot or cold because there is the potential to make people sick.

The use of “residential-style kitchen” or “[cottage kitchen](#)” is known as a limited food establishment. Pennsylvania’s rules follow those of the Code of Federal Regulation or CFR. You can find details about both, including contact information via the [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Food Safety](#).

### ***Protecting Yourself: Liability, Insurance, and Duty of Care***

An agritourism business must have adequate liability insurance coverage in case of an accident on the farm. The farm can choose to use its own insurance company or opt for an insurance agent specializing in agritourism and farm coverage. Check with your insurance agency for more information.

All businesses have risks. However, agritourism operations have some unique risks to consider keeping yourself, your business, and your guests safe. Keep in mind that many visitors to your farm are not familiar with farm practices, animals, or equipment. Think about this potential lack of familiarity when designing experiences on your farm and providing information to guests. Think about things like your guests’ navigation, where you want them to be or not. Also, think about what will happen during different seasons or types of weather. Consider especially hazards like dangerous animals, equipment, and the spread of disease.

The key is to lead with what is called the “duty of care.” Duty of care means that you thought about the well-being of others on your farm. Duty of care essentially means you should lead with common sense and the golden rule, to treat others how you would like to be treated, especially in unfamiliar circumstances.

One worry for anyone in business is their responsibility for their guests, like accidents on their property, especially when it comes to something that may be financially threatening to your business. This concern makes liability a pressing issue. Some states have passed agritourism liability protection statutes.

Act 27 [The Agritourism Activity Protection Act](#) was enacted in 2021. This Act is a means to protect farmers from frivolous lawsuits, which in turn helps them feel more comfortable hosting fee and/or non-fee-based guests on their properties. The Act requires guests to be notified through statements and signage about the farm’s liability responsibility. For example, a sign that is at least three by two feet should state:

*"WARNING: Read your written agreement or the back of your ticket. Under Pennsylvania law, except for limited circumstances, an agritourism activity provider is not liable for any injury to or death of a participant resulting from an agritourism activity. Do not participate in the activity if you do not wish to waive liability." ([legis.state.pa](#), 2021).*

This notification makes it clear to the guest that they have a responsibility for exercising common precautions on your land. You can read the full text of the Act via [legis.state.pa.us](https://legis.state.pa.us).

Even with specific protection through the state, here are some considerations that may help you take the best care possible of your guests' safety and well-being:

- **Access to buildings**
  - Is it clear where guests are permitted or not?
  - Can guests with mobility challenges get in and out?
  - Are there slippery surfaces that should be marked?
- **Animal control**
  - Are animals out of reach that should not be touched or disturbed?
- **Attractive nuisances** (pretty things that attract children but are dangerous to them)
  - Are water features like ponds or troughs secured?
- **Fire prevention**
  - Are you up to fire code and monitor your occupancy rules?
  - Are you controlling smoking on your property?
  - Do you have smoke detectors and fire extinguishers?
- **Food safety**
  - Are you following food service guidelines for food and drink?
- **Lighting**
  - Can guests see where they are going to avoid trip and fall accidents?
- **Operation of machinery**
  - Is machinery out of reach of guests?
- **Parking and traffic**
  - How do cars get in and out without jeopardizing others?
- **Pest control**
  - Are chemicals used for pest control out of public areas?
- **Recreational activities**
  - How do you control firearms or other visitors' equipment like snowmobiles, horses, or four-wheelers?
- **Responding to injuries**
  - What is your policy and procedure if someone gets hurt on your property?
  - What first aid supplies do you have handy?
  - Do you know first aid and how to reach and direct emergency services in your rural area if someone has a medical emergency on your property?

- **Security**
  - Do you have employees or equipment monitoring your property?
  - Is it clear to guests who work for you and who other visitors are through nametags or uniforms so they know whom to approach if they are in distress?
  - What is your policy and procedure for theft or burglary?
- **Storage areas**
  - Are your outbuildings secured?
- **Transportation**
  - Will you be providing shuttles, hay wagons, or tractor rides on your property?
- **Walkways**
  - Are walkways wide enough? Are there tripping hazards?
- **Warning signs**
  - Are signs visible, in good repair, and up to date?
- **Weather-related emergencies, natural disasters, or crimes**
  - What is your policy or procedure if there is an emergency on your property like flash flooding, severe storm, armed robbery, or even just a violent, threatening, or generally unruly guest?

Overall, an excellent business practice is to make a weekly to a monthly circuit of your property. Remember, your guest does not know your property as you do. Try to put yourself in their shoes and think if you were unfamiliar, would it be clear where you should go or what might be hazardous.

Never assume your visitor has the same farm knowledge as you about anything they may experience on your property, such as crops, animals, insects, implements, equipment, or other people that may also be working on the farm outside of your agritourism activities. When you walk your property, you are showing due diligence to your guests' environment. You are also proactively problem-solving hazards before they occur, which is always less costly than reacting after someone gets hurt or simply has a terrible experience on your farm.

*It might be necessary to work with other permitting agencies depending on your agrotourism activities:*

- [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms](#) (wineries, distilleries, and breweries)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture](#) (amusement rides and attractions)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture](#) (food handling and service)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture](#) (nursery or plant merchant license)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture](#) (petting zoo license)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection](#) (sanitary facilities)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) (summer camps, pools, public bathing places like lakes)

- [Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission](#) (regulated fishing)
  - [Public Access Rights to Water and Landowners](#)
    - Legislation protecting landowners who hold their lands and waters open for free public recreational use [Recreation on Land and Water Act](#)
- [Pennsylvania Game Commission](#) (regulated hunting land or shooting ranges)
- [Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board](#) (wineries, distilleries, and breweries)
- Or check the [Small Business Association's Federal and State Business License Look-Up Tool](#)

***Further reading on Safety:***

- National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety [Integrating Safety into Agritourism](#)
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) [Agricultural Health & Safety Center Resources](#)
- Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) [Occupational Health and Safety Administration Guide for Small Business](#)

## Part Three: Strategies for Success

In this section, we will:

- Discuss the tools you need to succeed.
- Review the basics of marketing with a special focus on electronic tools like social media.
- Outline tools you can use to evaluate your business.
- Describe the importance of great service for increasing revenue.
- Encourage you to develop a network to support your business' growth.

Once you have taken all the necessary business start-up tasks, you are ready to think about the things you need to succeed. Let's start with the basics, your electronic tools.

### Having the Right Electronic Tools

Every business needs the right tools. First, you need a computer that connects to the internet using a web browser. A browser is a tool your computer uses to show you things on the internet. There are different browser brands such as Chrome, Firefox, Safari, or Edge. Since you are probably reading this handbook online or you have opened it and printed it online, you probably understand the basics of web browsers and already have one you prefer, but we wanted to make sure you knew the basics.

The next thing you should know is your [operating system](#). An operating system is what your computer uses to run its most basic functions. If you have an Apple product, your operating system, or OS, is called Mac. Everything else is PC as it uses a Windows operating system by the company Microsoft. There are other operating systems, but for personal computing, you likely have one of those two. You might need to know which one you are using for the next steps, which are the essential electronic tools for your business.

Smaller computers or mobile devices also have operating systems such as tablets, smartwatches, and smartphones. The smaller size makes these more mobile. A mobile device will usually have a touch screen interface instead of the full keyboards found on desktop and laptop computers. Like their bigger counterparts, mobile devices fall into two general categories of Android or Apple. [Android](#) uses a Microsoft Operating System, and Apple uses an iPhone or [iOS](#) operating system.

To get started, you need basic computing tools for business. There are the five essentials:

1. A reliable and consistent internet connection.
2. An office [productivity suite](#) of apps (suite just means a group of tools that work together. An app is a tool that organizes digital information in a way that is helpful).

Two options include:

- [MS Office 365](#)
- [Google Workspace](#) (used to be called G Suite)
- Both of these work on Mac or PC

3. A professional business email **that is separate** from your personal email.
4. A smartphone with internet capability and a data plan for your dedicated business phone number that answers with a standard business greeting and voicemail.
5. A professional website with a dedicated website name (called a domain name or home URL)
  - Every business needs a website. **A Facebook page is not a website** but rather a social media channel. There are many website builder vendors to help you get started with easy templates. Some examples: [GoDaddy](#), [SquareSpace](#), and [Wix](#).

Here are some of the basic office productivity tools in Microsoft 365, what they do, and their Google equivalent:

App Name	What you do with it (With Google Equivalent)
<b>Outlook</b>	Send and receive emails (Google equivalent: Gmail)
<b>Word</b>	Create letters, brochures, and professional correspondence. (Google equivalent: Docs)
<b>PowerPoint</b>	Make presentations and slideshows (Google equivalent: Google Slides)
<b>Excel</b>	Track numerical information, make calculations, and present it visually (i.e., a chart or graph) (Google equivalent: Sheets)
<b>Calendar</b>	Organize appointments and schedules. (Google equivalent: Calendar)
<b>To-Do</b>	Make lists and manage tasks for yourself or across your staff. (Google equivalent: Keep)
<b>Forms</b>	Collect information from other people using online forms. (Google equivalent: Forms)
<b>OneDrive</b>	Save and share documents securely using the internet instead of a specific device. OneDrive using <a href="#">cloud computing</a> . That is why the icon (symbol) for this app is a cloud. (Google equivalent: Google Drive)

<b>Teams</b>	Meet virtually with employees, vendors, or clients. (Google equivalent: Meet).
<b>Booking</b>	Allows guests to schedule events, classes, experiences, and stays (Google extensions, like Koalender available in the Google Workplace Marketplace). See the section of the book on scheduling and booking for more information.

**Table 5**

You will find that 365 and Google Workspace have many other apps. Others work as add-ins to your existing suite of apps. Some add-ins are called extensions. When using an extension for any of your existing apps, take care to read the reviews carefully. Sometimes, an app is free because it comes with lots of advertising.

Otherwise, basic office productivity suites, whether Microsoft or Google, should do everything a small business needs to function well. Both work on PC or Mac operating systems.

### ***Cloud Everything***

Once you have the right tools, your business will be mobile, and your office will be anywhere you can connect to the internet. You will have this ability because systems like Office 365 and Google Workspace use cloud computing. There is not one cloud in particular. A **cloud** is a private and secure personal space on a company’s large system of computers called a server. Many companies offer cloud storage, which means there is not one big cloud. There are many cloud options, but people still call it “the cloud,” making it sound like there is just one.

Connectivity to a cloud means your files, pictures, documents, and accounts are recorded on servers and not on any computer or device in particular. Everything is stored on the internet and not on one tablet, phone, laptop, or desktop computer. If you are used to being tied to one computer or device, cloud computing will take some getting used to. In the simplest terms, cloud computing means storing and accessing data and programs over the internet instead of your computer’s internal storage area called a hard drive.

You and your employees can store, share, and collaborate on things from anywhere on any device that is connected to the internet. Keeping things on the cloud means that you or your staff can do business from anywhere on the farm and beyond. This connectivity will give you freedom, flexibility, and less time closeted in an office, and more time doing other things to help your business perform well and grow.

### ***Cut the Clutter: Going Digital on the Cloud***

Cloud-based computing is also a fantastic way to cut your business clutter. If you have a phone that takes pictures, you have a scanner in your hand! You do not need a separate piece of equipment to digitize and store your documents. You can snap photos of handwritten notes, pictures, invoices, and other documents. These images get saved on your password protected

cloud storage. Then, these are easy to organize and find later. Then you can access your important documents anywhere because your secure filing cabinet is accessible anywhere you can get an internet connection. Two free scanning apps to explore:

- [Adobe Scan](#)
- [Microsoft Lens](#)

## Marketing: Letting Them Know “I’m Here!”

### Introduction to Marketing

Marketing an agricultural tourism product is different from marketing other products. Tourism requires a special type of marketing called service marketing. Service marketing has four main characteristics.

**1) A service product, such as tourism, cannot be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted before it is purchased.** Customers can evaluate non-service products before purchasing them by using the five senses. The best way for a customer to know if they like a tourism product is to experience it. Once the tourism experience has ended, the customer can judge the experience and form an opinion about the tourism product and service.

**2) A service product cannot be separated from the customer.** The customer is a part of the product in tourism. Suppose that you go to a movie theatre and the theatre is very quiet and enjoyable when you first arrive. As the movie starts, a loud and distracting group of people decides to sit right in front of you. These loud customers will affect your movie experience. The same is true for tourism. Customers influence the experiences of other customers. It is important to have a plan that minimizes the negative effects that customers can have on your agritourism business while also respecting the rights of all visitors.

**3) Service products face the constant challenge of remaining consistent.** For example, suppose you go to a local restaurant with your family. At the restaurant, everything is perfect. The servers are very attentive, the food is great, and the experience is generally positive and happy. Now, suppose you visit the same restaurant a few months later, remembering the wonderful experience from the last visit. This time, the restaurant is poorly staffed, you are forced to wait an extended time for your meals, and the servers seem very tired and stressed. The second experience is likely to change your opinion of the restaurant. The main point of this example is that you expected high quality of service, based on your first experience, but received lower quality of service because of a change in the service product. In this example, changes in staff or restaurant volume led to a different experience each time. In service-oriented organizations, it is important to work toward keeping your services as consistent as possible. You want the guests that visit your agritourism site today to have the same quality experience when they return next time.

4) **Finally, a service product like tourism is a perishable product.** An example of this, in tourism, is that of hotels. Once a hotel room remains empty for a night, it is impossible to regain a sale of that product. Services take place over time, so they also expire with time, never to be regained. It is vital to realize that your agritourism service is perishable, so it must be used, or it will expire, which is a lost opportunity to make a sale.

## **Visualizing What You Have to Market: The Traditional Four Ps of Marketing**

Since tourism is an experience-based product, success in tourism will be dependent, in part, on your understanding of marketing terms and the different ways that the terms apply to agritourism. This section explains product, place, promotion, and pricing as fundamental marketing considerations.

[Marketing](#) is a process where you get great clarity on what you have and how you will get it to someone who will buy it. In 1960, E. Jerome McCarthy created a model to help with this clarity called the *Four Ps*, and its simplicity is what makes it still relevant today. The Four P's is a way of looking at what you are selling in four parts to get it to your target market effectively. Think of these as ingredients as if you were making a cake. The ingredients make what is called the [marketing mix](#). The basic ingredients in the mix are product, place, price, and promotion.

Marketing is not selling. While [sales](#) focus on your needs as the seller and profit is made through a volume of transactions, marketing focuses on the needs of the buyer. Profit is made through customer satisfaction that extends positively to more customers.

Marketing is also not advertising. Advertising only refers to one part of marketing, which is impersonal communication. For example, a billboard is a type of advertising that might be one part of an overall marketing plan. Marketing can include advertising, but advertising by itself is not the same thing as marketing. So, do not think of marketing and advertising as synonyms.

**Product** – What are you selling? What is your good, service, creation, or experience?

We covered the [goods to services continuum](#) earlier in the book. Agritourism is a service product, which consists of a range of goods and services.

**Place** – Where is your product in relation to those who might buy it?

Place is your location or the location of many potential customers, also called a [target market](#).

Location considerations also include:

- *Relative locations* — Describes how far the customers are from your business.
- *Coverage* — This is how big the area is from which you draw customers. Think of coverage as if you cast an imaginary fishing net over a map of the state, country, or

world where your customers are. The parts inside the net are your coverage or sometimes called your catchment area. You can visualize the net “catching” your customers.

- *Sense of place* – This is the culmination of one’s thoughts, feelings, and expectations about a region or destination. When these thoughts, feelings, and expectations about a place’s identity are strategically cultivated and expressed, they become a place brand.

**Promotion** – How will people find out about your business to become customers?

Promotion can include:

- *Personal selling* – Simply put, personal selling is persuading people to buy your product in a small interactive group.
- *Sales promotion* – Sales promotion involves using coupons, contests, and other incentives to attract customers.
- *Publicity* – Publicity means generating news about your business, which might involve hosting events that attract some form of media coverage. For a concert, inviting a local radio station that plays the same type of music as the performers might significantly improve publicity for your location.
- *Advertising* – Involves specifically telling people about the services available at your business to increase public interest.
- *Merchandising* – Merchandising involves selling items with your business name or label on them. Examples include T-shirts, baseball caps, or other items available for sale at your business. People who wear these items increase visibility for your business, which will help to promote it in the future.

**Pricing** – What method or methods of pricing will you use?

There are several pricing strategies to consider, which can be used in combination:

- *Profit-oriented pricing* – Profit pricing involves adjusting prices to match the demand for your product while exceeding the cost of producing the product. The result is profit maximization.
- *Sales-oriented pricing* – this method raises prices as sales increase to maximize profits without significantly reducing your sales. One problem with this method is that it can reduce the trust of customers who purchase your products because of the low prices. They might choose to find another provider if prices rise too much.
- *Cost-oriented pricing* – this method raises prices as your costs for producing the products rise. For example, if you are selling corn and the cost of fertilizer rises, then you might have to raise the price of corn to compensate for a rise in production cost.

- *Competition-oriented pricing* – this method adjusts prices as other businesses offering the same services adjust their prices (usually lowering prices for a competitive edge).

The diagram below can help you conceptualize these four basic ingredients of the mix. It also helps you visualize that no one part of the mix is more important than the other. Each ingredient comes together to make the whole (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3**

After understanding the mix better and considering some of the options, you should be complete the following worksheet:

## Marketing Mix: Worksheet

Element of My Marketing Mix	Question to Ask Yourself	Write Your Answer	Check Your Answer. Did my answer explain...
 <b>Product</b>	What product or service are you selling?		This is what I have.
 <b>Price</b>	What pricing strategy will you use to sell your product or service.		This is what I am charging for it.
 <b>Place</b>	Where is your product or service available to buy?		This is where it is in relation to the buyer.
 <b>Promotion</b>	How will people find out about your product or service?		This is how I will tell people about it.

Table 6

### Additional Considerations for Tourism Marketing

Services are unique, which means there are a few extra ingredients to consider in your marketing mix. These all start with the letter P too, which can help you keep track. Here are some additional Ps to think about as you consider how you will make the connection between what you have to sell and who might buy it.

#### People

Business is about people, but different groups of people are involved in business in different ways. Business operations involve three groups of people in particular.

- *Service personnel* – You must not forget the importance of your people. The workers who directly interact with your customers can have a serious impact on the image of your business. Happy employees are more likely to interact well with customers.
- *Tourists* – These are your customers or guests. Many of them will not be from the local area, so it is important to be respectful toward other cultures while also securing the quality of your product.
- *Local residents* – These are your neighbors and other members of the community. When you bring visitors to your business, you are also bringing them to the local community. Not everyone in the community may be happy about

that. It is good to be involved with local organizations that relate to your business because it helps make good relationships that can significantly strengthen your business.

### **Packaging**

In tourism, this refers to combining several services into one price. For example, you might have a two-night farm stay that also includes horseback riding as a part of the package. Many different elements of the tourism experience can be included in one package.

### **Partnerships**

Partnerships are formed between organizations to take advantage of potential mutual benefits. For example, a hotel might recommend a specific local restaurant to customers in exchange for a reduction in catering costs. Another way that companies can work together is by sharing marketing or other information.

### **Physical Evidence**

This refers to the setting of the product or service. This setting includes uniforms, décor, furniture, signage, structure, and the tangible things that make up the visitor experience.

### **Process**

The process is the system of delivery for your product or service. It includes the set of standards that you follow before, during, and after each transaction.

Once you understand the ingredients, you are ready to consider how you communicate about them, called marketing communication.

## **Marketing Communication**

Marketing can be as simple as word-of-mouth referral or involve an intensive regional, national, or international media campaign. Your marketing style and message must be directed to your identified audience. If you are providing dude-ranch activities, for example, you may emphasize the experience of riding horses and outdoor activities. Anything you print must reflect these selling points in neat, high quality, and tasteful presentation. Sloppy advertisements or brochures reflect badly on your business.

The three basics of marketing communication include:

- **The message** (the two or three strong selling points and additional information about your service),
  - **The medium** (publications, radio, the internet, etc.),
  - And the **target audience** you're trying to reach.
- 
- **The Message:** Your message should talk about the type of activity or enterprise you offer, additional goods and services; directions to your location; costs of the activities; and how to make reservations. Try to be original in your marketing. Keep your message

simple. Always check dates, fees, addresses, and phone numbers for accuracy. Make certain the goods and services advertised represent what you can deliver.

- **The Medium:** Marketing includes a wide range of activities, from public relations and advertising to promotions and trade shows. Advertising is the most expensive approach. You should carefully consider all the following media and focus on those that fit your budget and reach your target audience. The medium is the method by which the message is delivered to your potential clients.

They might include:

- Billboards
- Brochures
- Chamber of Commerce
- Cooperative ads
- Direct mail
- Local stores
- Magazines
- Newsletters
- Newspapers
- Online booking agent
- Radio
- Repeat visitor
- Search engine (like Google)
- Social Media
- Television
- Trade journals
- Trade shows
- Travel agents/tour operators
- Visitors Bureau
- Welcome or Information Centers
- Word-of-mouth referral

The medium you choose will determine the costs. Effective marketing communication needs a budget. New operations typically spend 10-25% of total operational costs on marketing for the first few years. It's essential to keep good records of the response to specific marketing efforts so you can be more effective. With time and reputation, costs for marketing will be reduced.

- **The target audience:** Your target audience is the group of people that you are aiming to engage with this piece of marketing communication. The target audience is the most likely group you want to connect with using this message. A target market is your most likely group of customers or those that are best matched with your product. You may have several audiences within a target market.

### **Push versus pull strategies: Are you coming or going?**

Two big categories of marketing strategies are push and pull. Push strategies are when you bring your product or experiences to the customer. Examples include billboards, a newspaper ad, or a commercial on the radio to generate interest. Push marketing can be quickly implemented and yield quick results but has a brief impact on customers.

Pull strategies are when the customer comes to you. The customer may already have an interest, and your pull strategy provides that extra bit of incentive to get them to make the

transaction. Examples include your website, social media accounts, a news story, or in-person sales when the customer is already on your property.

Pull strategies help people sell themselves on your product or service once they're aware of it. This type of strategy is done in response to what customers need to get the most value from an ongoing relationship with your business.

Pull marketing can take longer than push marketing to implement or yield results but has a more lasting impact on customers.

### ***Traditional or Digital Communication***

Marketing communication can be traditional or digital. Traditional is anything that is not on the internet in electronic form. Let's think about a classic push example of a billboard on the side of the highway. You may be able to estimate the number of cars that pass that billboard, but you will not know how many times it was viewed, for how long, or who was incentivized by the billboard to make a purchase. It is challenging to know the impact of your investment. Fortunately, many traditional-style communications can be purposed into digital format. The advantage of digital is that you can track things like the number and type of viewers who engage with your advertisement.

### **Advertising versus Public Relations**

Advertising includes paid forms of marketing communications. These are usually impersonal push techniques. Examples include direct mail, cold calls, billboards, or newspaper ads.

Public relations are where you create positive hype and buzz about your business in a way that reflects positively on the business. This buzz will help you create a favorable public image to attract customers and generate community support. An example of public relations can include sponsoring an event, doing a familiarization tour (or [FAM tour](#)), or hosting a community picnic on your property.

Public relations can cost money. For example, sponsoring a local team can build positive public relations, but your business contributes to the cost of the team uniforms or equipment. However, there are many opportunities for you to use to tell the stories of your farm-based business to develop relationships with your existing and potential customers, business partners, and your community.

### ***The FAM Tour***

Inviting people who can tell others about what you offer is called a familiarization or FAM tour. These are forms of public relations that are very effective for agritourism operations. Participants in the FAM tour can include writers, others in your network, travel writers, tour operators, or social media [influencers](#). First, invite guests to experience your farm-based business free or at a significantly reduced charge. Then, treat the guest like a VIP and show them the very best that your business has to offer.

## **Word of Mouth and Public Relations in One: Social Channels**

[Social media](#) is an essential and cost-effective way to attract new customers and keep up with existing ones. Social media is a form of digital marketing because it is a way to promote your business online. One way to think of social media is similar to how you think of channels on TV. Each channel has different types of content that suit different viewers, such as sports, news, comedy, or cartoons.

Social media has different content and “viewers,” too. This difference is why social media options are called channels, or social channels. When you think about the channel provider, the content that is broadcast is put together by the channel provider. Social media is different because the channel provider provides an online place for the content, but the “viewers,” which are the channel’s users, are the creators of the content. Unlike TV, users of a social media channel can connect based on their shared interests.

Social media channels are different from TV channels. When you are watching a show in your living room, you cannot connect with other people also watching the same show and talk to them about it through the channel. Social media is like being able to make a commercial for television and broadcast it for free. However, unlike a TV commercial, social media content can be highly targeted to your viewers, and you can track what is happening to it.

There are dozens of social channels, and not all of them are mainstream. Some of the more popular ones are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, Reddit, Flickr, Tumblr, Google+, and others. It can be overwhelming, and each one has slightly different purposes and therefore ways to use it best.

Let’s look at some of the most popular and easiest to get started. Keep in mind that posts do not have to be about you personally or other people. You can focus on crops, products, animals, a beautiful view, or post older pictures of things on your farm called throwbacks. Below are some examples for each channel (see Table 7 and Figure 4).

Social Channel	The Basics	What to post	Example	How Often to Post	Where to find out more and get started
<b>Facebook</b> 	<p>This is like your website, but it allows for more interaction with viewers. You gain followers and build a community of people who want to be up to date on what's happening with your business.</p>	<p>Post your hours, parking information, available facilities, what to bring, locations, promotions, news, photos, congratulations, events, or thank-yous.</p>	<p>Make a friendly announcement about this week's times for hayrides with a picture of some of the scenery or people on a previous ride, pricing, and what is included.</p>	<p>Once or twice a week or as news is relevant.</p>	<p><a href="#">Facebook for Small Business</a></p>
<b>Instagram</b> 	<p>This is like a slide show of what happens at your business each week.</p>	<p>Post fun visuals that are in the moment and action oriented. Think of pictures of people enjoying your products or experiences.</p>	<p>Post a picture of those delighted school children feeding the goats on their tour this morning.</p>	<p>Several times a week, depending on stories or feed. Stories are only available for 24 hours after they are posted and will then disappear.</p>	<p><a href="#">Instagram for Business: Getting Started</a></p>
<b>LinkedIn</b> 	<p>LinkedIn allows you to build a professional network of similar businesses or people with information that will help your business. It helps you relate business-to-business (also called B2B).</p>	<p>Post text and pictures about interesting professional news and stories related to your business, your suppliers, and people who work with or for you.</p>	<p>Post a picture announcing how excited you are to have that new intern studying agriculture science join you this summer with a picture of her and a little biographical information.</p>	<p>Once a week or as news is relevant.</p>	<p><a href="#">LinkedIn Marketing Solutions</a></p>

<p><b>Pinterest</b></p> 	<p>Pinterest is like a big bulletin board. Think of this as a “wall of fame” of the best pictures of the family, friends, creations, and moments.</p>	<p>Post eye-catching visuals that are more static than dynamic – posed rather than action shots. Pinterest is best used for pictures of products more than guests.</p>	<p>Post a picture of that gorgeous cake you just made with fresh-from-the-farm eggs.</p>	<p>Once or twice a week.</p>	<p><a href="#">Pinterest for Business</a></p>
<p><b>Twitter</b></p> 	<p>Twitter is a helpful conversation-starter. It is bits of small talk. These are your best, most interesting thoughts, but public.</p>	<p>Post short text snippets that are meant to generate a conversation.</p>	<p>Post how great that crisp fall air felt today and how you’re getting excited about the harvest. Be pithy and to the point.</p>	<p>Daily to several times a week.</p>	<p><a href="#">Twitter Basics for Business</a></p>
<p><b>YouTube</b></p> 	<p>YouTube is effective for video content like demonstrations, tours, or recording experiences.</p>	<p>Post content that shows audio and video that is better shown than described.</p>	<p>Make an informational video about your hive system and how you harvest the honey that the guests at your farm stay enjoy at each of your scrumptious breakfasts.</p>	<p>These are more time-intensive, so try posting a video or two for each season.</p>	<p><a href="#">You Tube Creator Academy Bootcamp</a></p>

**Table 7**

# What to talk about on each channel: *Example Wine Tasting Bar*



Figure 4

### *What's an influencer?*

Social media influencers are public relations and digital marketing resources. Influencers are people who have a significant following on social media. Their [followers](#) trust their recommendations or want to emulate something about the influencer's lifestyle. Think of these as a trusted journalist or commentator you have read in a newspaper or seen on television. Some influencers are also celebrities for other reasons, such as music, movies, or modeling. However, many influencers' fame is purely through social media advertising.

Influencers exist at different scales based on their followers and reach or based on their views. These range from regular to mega. Following Figure 5 below, levels 3, 4, and 5 are the most accessible to agritourism operations. You will also notice that these levels are the least expensive, most authentic, and more engaging.

## Social Influencer Levels

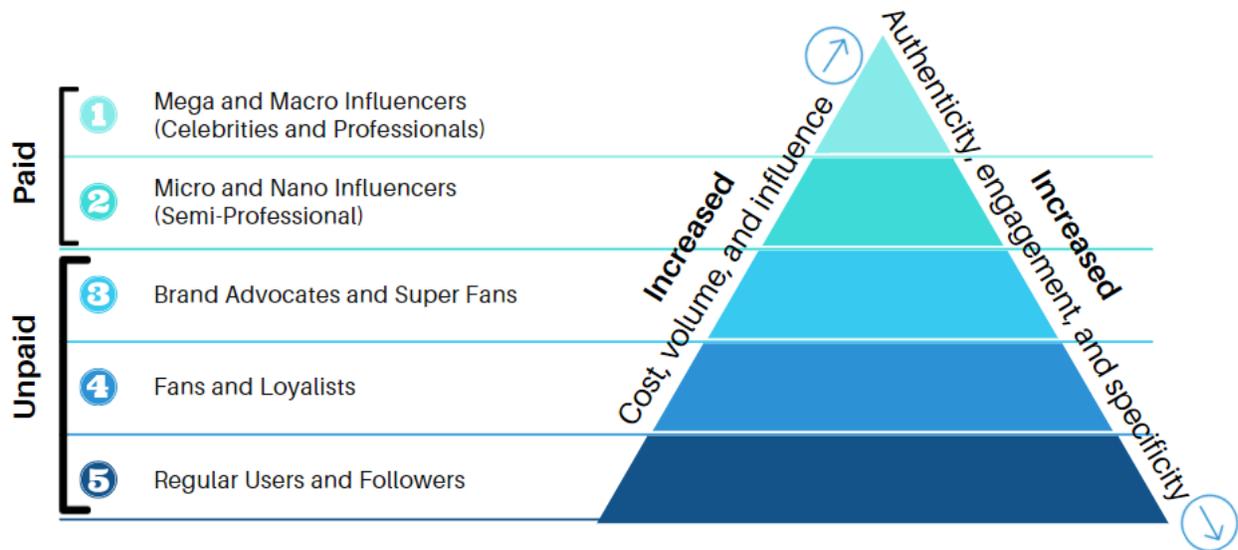


Figure 5

An influencer may drive someone to look at your channel. However, that may not be meaningful. Do not strive to get views or clicks. As a farmer, you probably understand the difference between quality and quantity. Think of social [engagement](#) in the same way. Harvesting a lot of views is not the same as having many engaged followers. When you put Figures 5 and 6 together, you can see how your most engaged followers can also work as unpaid social media influencers, which is like double-dipping on the effectiveness of that social media effort. Like any marketing investment, you can gauge if it is worthwhile by using research to build insight on how guests learn about your business to decide what is worth continued effort and investment.

When considering social influencer levels, you can see that only the top tiers are paid influencers (see Figure 5). You are unlikely to invest in levels one and two directly but might through associations, co-ops, collectives, or partnerships you might belong to. There are some who have a big following who might just like your values, your location, or what you do. In this sense, influencer marketing can be by happenstance or occur organically. So, this brings us back to the importance of great customer service. Treat every in-person or digital guest to your farm or its channels like a significant would-be influencer.

## Levels of Social Engagement with your Business, Products, and Services



Figure 6

### *Speaking Socially*

Most social channels operate with similar basics and lingo. Let's get to know some of the common terms to get into the social way of speaking.

**Comment** – is when someone uses emojis and/or text to react to content in more detail than selecting one of the channel's predetermined reaction emojis.

**Content** – is what you publish in the channel. This can be audio, video, images, or text.

**Click-through** – is when someone clicks on what you published, which is more interaction than an impression or view. The times content is compared to the times it was clicked is called click-through rate.

**Dashboard** – is like your home base for your account where you can make changes to settings or check who is looking at what you publish to the account. The dashboard usually includes analytics. Analytics are numbers about your activity on the account and who is looking at your material.

**Feed** – describes the personalized stream of information a user gets when they open their social media channel. Each user's feed will vary based on their connections and the things they interact with on that channel.

**Engagement** – is when users are interacting with what you put on the channel. Engagement includes things like downloads, views, reactions, and comments.

**Emojis** – are diagrams of facial expressions and symbols that can help you add emotion or summary to a message. There are thousands available, but most social channels have about a hundred commonly understood symbols like a smiley face for happiness, or a thumbs up for approval, or a heart for love.

- Emoticons – are like emojis but only use characters you type from a keyboard. For example, this is a happy face emoji 😊, and this is the happy face emoticon :-).
- Bitmojis – these are emojis that are you in cartoon form. You can make your face into an emoji form. This makes this emoji uniquely you as a signature or a profile picture.

**Ephemeral content** - content that disappears after a set period of time. For example, Instagram and Facebook stories are limited to a lifespan of 24 hours. On Snapchat, messages to friends disappear as soon as the user has left the app — after having opened the message.

**Followers** – these are the people you have a relationship with electronically on the social channel. These have different names based on the channel. In some cases, the relationship is a mutual connection. A connection is a two-way relationship. A follower is a one-way relationship that allows the follower to get information from you.

**Ghosting** – this term is used mainly for romantic relationships. However, you can also be ghosted by a customer or be described as ghosting a customer. Ghosting means you had an interaction online and then suddenly stopped communicating and essentially disappeared, like a ghost.

**Going viral** –when something you post gets widely circulated over one or many social channels. Truly going viral means that the image, post, or quote is easily recognizable by everyday users. Getting many likes or followers is not the same as going viral.

**Handle** – your unique name on the channel. Usually, your handle starts with an @ symbol.

**Hashtag(s)** – these are what is also called the pound or number sign (#), such as #farmvacations or #summerfun. You put a [hashtag](#) in social posts to help searchers find things that are relevant to them. It is a way to mark keywords in your post. For example, if you wanted to have the channel categorize your post under agritourism, you would end your post with #agritourism. Your hashtag can include your business name, a contest, or an event—for example, #FourMFarms. Sometimes an organization may have its own hashtag or one for a cause or event. Using their hashtag shows support or solidarity with that group.

The hashtag always comes before the word. There are no spaces in hashtags. You can use upper and lowercase letters.

**Impression** – this refers to the number of times what you published was shown to a channel user.

**GIF** – a GIF is a type of picture that has motion. It is pronounced JIF, like the peanut butter. These can be attention-grabbing. Every computer file has letters after it so that the computer knows what to do with it. The letters GIF after the name of the picture mean it's a graphic interchange format. GIF means there is movement in the image, but it is a snippet of movement and not an entire video.

**Meme** – is a picture with a caption that is meant to be funny or sarcastic because it is relatable or reflects something understood from popular culture. Meme is pronounced mee-muh (not mem-eh or me-me). The caption usually uses standard fonts (lettering) that make the image recognizable as a meme. As users pass the meme along through their social channels, the caption is often changed. Think of a meme as a visual metaphor of something humorous or relevant to current events (see Figure 7).



Figure 7 (Icanhascheezburger.com, 2021)

**Mentions** – this is when you specifically identify a person or organization in your post or comment. A mention usually starts with @ and is followed by the person's or business's name or handle.

**QR code** – these are quick response codes. You can make one for almost anything, including your business or its products. You can use an online QR code generator to do this. QR codes are like bar codes on products in the grocery store (see Figure 8). Each one is unique to that item and can be read by a scanner. A smartphone can scan QR codes automatically using the phone's camera and/or a QR reader app.

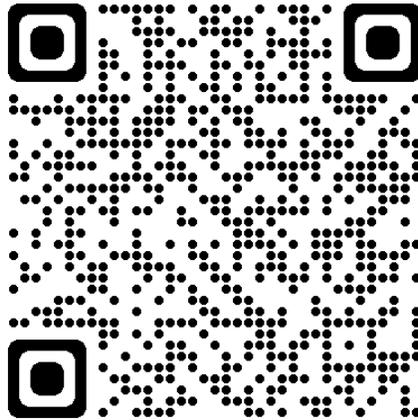


Figure 8

**Post** – what you publish to the social channel like the text, image, audio, or video. The post will have a date attached so the viewer knows how recent or relevant the post is.

**Poster** – the person responsible for publishing the content. If someone copies or shares a post, they may refer to the original author of it as OP for the original poster.

**Profile picture** – this is the image that is associated with your account on the channel. It makes you or your business easily recognizable and gives the viewer an impression of you or your business.

**Reaction** – when a user clicks one of the available options to express their reaction to a post. They click one of many options depending on the channel, such as supporting, celebrating, loving, sad, and disliking. Each reaction is selected using a corresponding emoji such as a thumbs up, clapping hands, heart, frown face, or thumbs-down. Some social channels operate on a points system where users upvote or downvote content. More upvotes push the posts into more users' views, so the upvoting or downvoting system is like liking or disliking a post.

**Review** – this is when a customer leaves written feedback. Reviews can include comments, praise, questions, complaints, and concerns.

**Share** – when content has been reposted or forwarded to others on the channel or outside the channel. For example, you may like a post and share it with someone else through an email. When people want others to see the post, they share it.

**Spam** – an unwanted email sent to a large number of recipients that is a nuisance in your email box. Spam is often untrustworthy and often includes scams, fraudulent information, or

information that can harm your computer if downloaded (i.e., viruses, spyware, or malware).

**Story** - a collection of photos or videos compiled into one digital album that can be shared with other users on the platform. It is like a slide show or compilation. Some stories are time-sensitive and expire, which makes them ephemeral.

**Tagging** – where you recognize other users on the channel with whom you have a relationship. [Tags](#) can be the person or place's username, and sometimes this will start with the @ sign followed by the user or business name. Tagging is like mentioning someone in a conversation, but the mention gets linked to that person or business. Sometimes these are called mentions or shout-outs. Some channels distinguish between a tag and a mention. For example, some platforms will only allow a tag to be made by the author of the post, but anyone can make a mention. The purpose of either is the same. It is to recognize someone or a group you know publicly.

**Throwback** – this is when you post something historical or vintage. Some channels have days where they encourage throwback content like “Throwback Thursday,” where members are encouraged to post something vintage or from the old days. Anytime you post something older, it’s called a “throwback.”

**Thumbnail** – this refers to a preview or smaller picture. These are called this because these images are usually smaller than the size of an actual thumbnail.

**Traffic** –the amount of activity associated with your accounts. Think of your social channel like a street with a storefront. The busier the street, the more your storefront will get noticed, and in turn, the more likely you to come inside and buy something.

**Trolling** – is when someone spreads negative information online in a way that intends to upset the target on purpose. Trolling is especially common through online review platforms.

**Views** – an impression means the content showed up on the channel. A view indicates that there was more engagement with the content, such as the viewer read, downloaded, or clicked on your post.

### ***Best Practices for your Social Channels***

Here are some general tips that work for all social channels.

- If you are new to social media, start slowly. Get the hang of one platform before you start on another. Build a following and then try to diversify.
- Separate personal and professional profiles completely.
- Remember, a business channel is about your business and not a place to broadcast unrelated philosophies, life advice, or world views.
- Use hashtags but keep these to three or less per post.

- Respond to reviews and messages with your customers.
- Check your channels daily, like your emails, and respond within 24 hours – one way to stay on top of things is to enable notifications. Notifications can alert you in one place, such as your email. Enabling real-time notifications means you will be alerted more quickly and be able to respond.
  - Keep in mind social media is asynchronous, which means that users send and receive communication on their time. It is important to be responsive, but there is no obligation to reply on-demand. You are, after all, running an entire business and not just social media. This extra demand is why large companies hire social media managers. If notifications are distracting or overwhelming, set aside one time of the day where you manage your social media or one channel in particular.
- Make it visual by adding photos, emojis, or color.
- Link everything. Be sure to link all your social media networking sites to your website and vice versa. Make the website the foundation for static content and, therefore your most stable, consistent, and reliable source of information. Your website is the foundation for your digital marketing house.
- Be active and interactive by updating your various sites often (at least once a week). When visitors make positive comments, respond and thank them. When visitors have questions, respond with an answer, even if it's to say that you are looking into their inquiry and will be in touch soon. If visitors make a negative comment, take the opportunity to apologize and recover, which is called [service recovery](#). Do not let a comment or post go unanswered for more than two days.
- Listen to what your social media users and customers are saying. Don't just push information to them.
- Be sure to answer questions, respond to comments, and thank users for their participation.
- Extend your business personality into the social media sphere. Be creative with your updates and posts, provide information that is of interest to your visitors, use pictures, write about your agritourism business, include fun facts, link to stories about your farm, link to other stories in your community, and include quotes from recent visitors.
- Don't be afraid to ask for participation from your guests. Make some of your posts more interactive by requesting information from your visitors. For example, you could ask them to send you photos or videos from their recent visits, their fondest memories of visiting your agritourism operation, or a picture of how they enjoy a product they purchased from you or something they learned on your farm. Or run an online contest, game, or scavenger hunt to incentivize users to come back.
- Develop a plan. Like any other kind of marketing, your social media marketing needs to be implemented according to a plan, the goals, who is responsible, budget, and a timeline if you want it to be successful.
- Plan ahead by thinking about upcoming events or seasons and how social media can be used to promote these events.

- Many channels have options for timed posts. So, you can develop content that releases when you schedule it.
- Remember, social media is a public relations tool. Use the right tool for the right job.
- Don't take yourself too seriously and have some fun!

## Apps and Wayfinding: Let them know Where You Are!

We have already covered how tourism is unique because it brings the buyer to the product instead of the other way around. This relationship between consumer and consumed means your guests need help finding you. We cover some of the basics in this section.

### Pennsylvania Tourism Signing Trust

The [Pennsylvania Tourism Signing Trust](#) is responsible for the state-wide Tourist Oriented and Directions Signing (TODS) Program. Tourist Oriented Directional Signing helps you reach travelers in cars on state and municipal roadways. [TODS](#) are placed within the geographical range of the business noted on the sign (see Figure 9).

The PA TODS program provides directional signing specifically to eligible businesses that decide to participate. Visit the Pennsylvania Signing Trust to determine [your eligibility](#).



Figure 9 (<https://palogo.org/>, 2021)

Many local regions also operate TODS programs. These are usually operated by the official [destination marketing or management organization](#) (DMO) We will cover DMOs later in this handbook. Signs can include welcome signs on the entry to a region or district, traffic signs, or pedestrian signs to help visitors navigate to and around the destination. An example of a pedestrian area TODS from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, is pictured in Figure 10. You can see that this sign links the destination's tourism businesses and facilities with clear navigation elements. It is best to check with your DMO to learn about eligibility for any local or regional TODS programs.



Figure 10 (GDC Design, 2021)

The Pennsylvania Signing Trust also manages the PA [Logo Program](#). Logo Signs provide information along highways to help motorists find services like lodging, fuel, and food. You probably recognize the Logo Program signs when you travel as the standard blue signs at highway exits (see Figure 11). Visit the website to find more about the program and your eligibility.



Figure 11 (<https://palogo.org/>, 2021)

## Google My Business, Google Maps, Getting Listed and Verified

Google is the overwhelming leader in these services, which is why we have focused on its services. Now that you understand some marketing, social media, and wayfinding basics, let's

review some free and essential resources. There are more complex and costly avenues with each. However, for now, we are just going to get you started with some basics. Remember to use the “Beyond this Handbook” Section in Part Four for many other places to get more in-depth support.

Google My Business is possibly a tool that you have used to look up a business. Visitors might use Google, a search engine when searching for activities or places. They trust Google to give them accurate and helpful information. As such, you should control what they see. This control begins with a couple of steps on Google My Business. This service is free and is an absolute must for helping your customers find you.

First, let's look at the anatomy of a typical Google results page to understand what happens when users search. When you put words into the Google Search Box and get results back, this is called a Search Engine Results Page or [SERP](#). Results on a SERP can be paid for or organic. There are other parts of a typical SERP like the Knowledge Box and the Answer Box. The basic division is anything at the top of the results page is paid for (see Figure 12), and anything organic, which is content that is not paid for, is below. The best way to make sure you have decent unpaid results and end up with effective local listings is to verify your business with Google My Business.

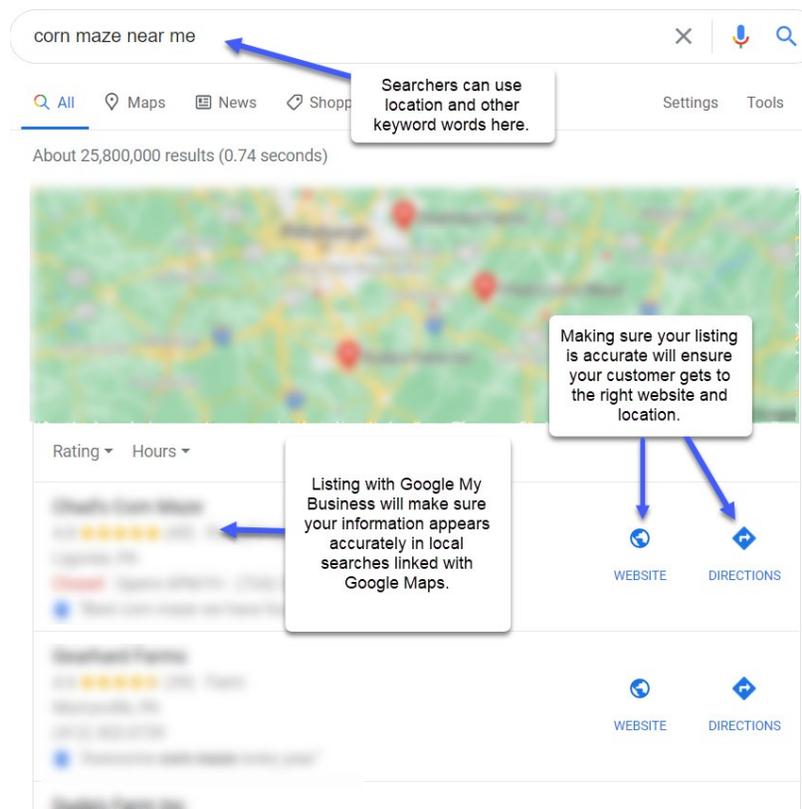


Figure 12

To get a Google My Business account, go to [google.com/business](https://www.google.com/business) and click “Manage now,” which will take you through the steps of creating an account. Remember, **a Google My Business Account does not automatically create a Business Profile**—it gives you access to it and the ability to add more to it. So, you’ll want to make sure you have an existing Business Profile to access.

Here is how you register for Google My Business (see Figure 13):

- 1) Go to <https://www.google.com/business/>
- 2) Click “Manage” Google will ask you to find or list your business.
- 3) Sign in or create a new Google Business Profile and account. It is a good idea to keep your personal Google, and Business Google accounts separate. This separation adds legitimacy and credibility to your Google presence.
- 4) Enter all your business information accurately.
- 5) Choose your verification option. Google will send you a verification postcard to make sure this physical address matches the business being listed.

Part of [organic search](#) results is local listings. This view will include Google Maps Listing. You may be surprised to see that your business is already listed in Google Maps. If this is the case, simply click “claim this business” to align it with your Google My Business account.

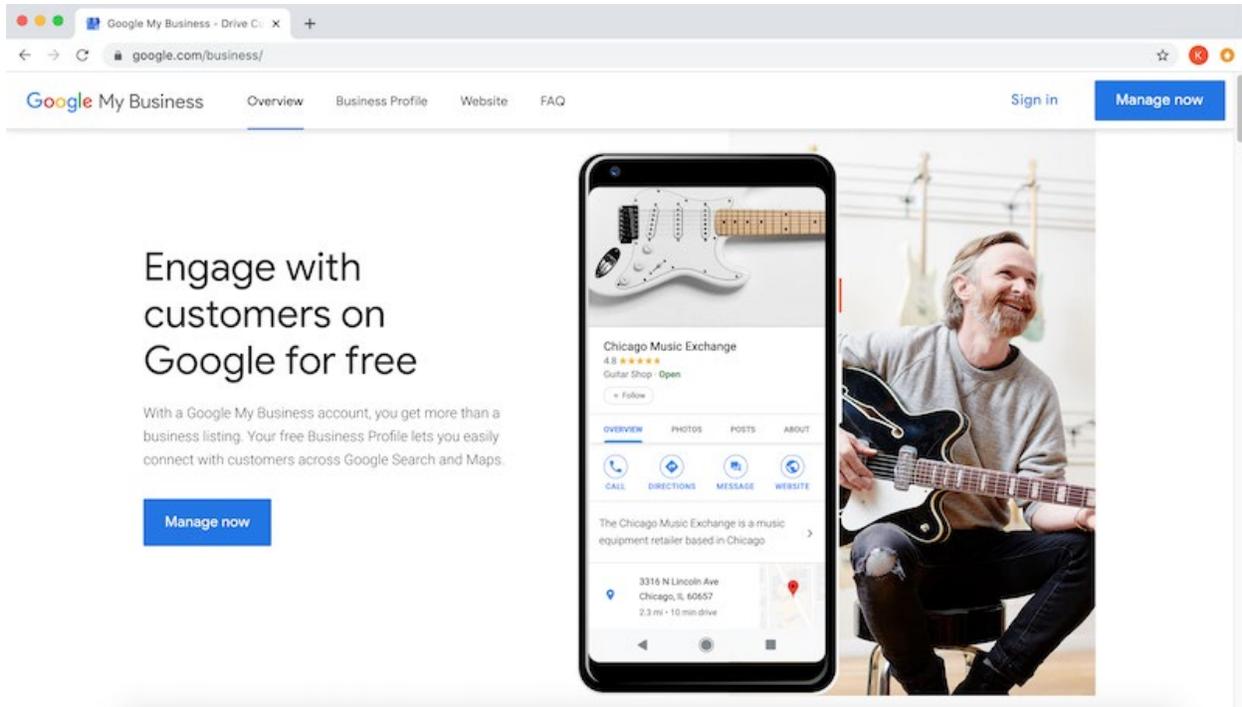


Figure 13

When you register, you will also get a free website and marketing kit for creating things like social media posts, helpful videos, and more. If any of this seems confusing, Google has an entire series of [helpful articles and videos](#) to walk you through the process.

Also, remember that creating a Google My Business account does not give you automatic access to your Business Profile. You need to complete one more step. Log into your Google My Business account, locate your separate Business Profile Google Maps, and then select the "Claim this business" or "Own this business?" You will see this link right in your profile. After these steps, your Google My Business account will then be connected with your Business Profile and under your management.

Here are some important tips for success:

- Add photos, update your content, and posts to your listing regularly.
- Do not neglect your account.
  - Make sure your information is up to date with seasonal hours or special events. This attention creates trust with searchers and will help avoid unhappy customers.
- Embed a Google Map on your website to help your customers find you more easily.
- Include keywords in your description. Your keywords are editable through your Google My Business Dashboard.
- Keep your information accurate.
- Monitor and respond to reviews.
- Monitor your analytics (called Google Trends). Analytics describes how searchers are finding your business using Google. Google summarizes and graphs all the ways that users are finding you and interacting with your content.
- Use your analytics to optimize your search results, which we will cover in the next section.

## **Search Engine Optimization**

Search engine optimization means making sure those searching can find your website. You do not have to know a lot about computers to make your search results better.

Some website basics will help you understand how important what you put on your webpage is. Computers speak in code. The code is translated into people's language through Html, which is short for Hypertext Markup Language. It uses common symbols, separate lines, letters, and numbers to tell the computer what to show on the screen. Let's say that you wanted a title in the middle of your webpage. The website creator app that you are using (like GoDaddy, SquareSpace, or Wix) to make your website is automatically adding in the Html that would look like this:

```
<html>
<head>
<title>My Agritourism Business</title>
</head>
```

The text in the brackets and separate lines is the Html code. What you will see on the screen when you pull up that page is the part that reads “My Agritourism Business”.

You will not need to know anything fancy to help your webpage be more prominent on Google or Bing (a search engine that is not as popular as Google. Likewise, you do not need special skills for search engine optimization, but it is helpful to know what is going on behind the scenes and how the search engine finds your website.

The behind-the-scenes of a search engine is called metadata. Metadata is the information on your web pages that exists in the Html of your page as what is called [meta-elements](#). There are different types of meta-elements, such as meta-titles, meta-tags, and meta-targets. Google looks at the visible content on your website and all the content that is not visible in the Html code in its meta-elements to match your page to what a searcher put in the search box.

The first step is to make sure Google can find you by checking you are indexed. Google explains how to do this *“Do a site: search for your site’s home URL. If you see results, you’re in the index. For example, a search for site:wikipedia.org”* (2021. Wikipedia’s home URL is wikipedia.org. Everything else on Wikipedia is built from that home. URL stands for Uniform Resource Locator, and it’s like the website’s main internet mailing address. The pages you build onto that main address are like rooms of the house. If you need to find those rooms, you can get to them through the main address. If you don’t find yourself using your site’s home URL, you are missing hits because Google is not able to find you.

Google finds webpages using “bots,” an automatic system of other computers that crawl the internet. Crawling just means the bots are automated to go looking for content to add to its massive list of websites called an index. Google’s bots are constantly crawling. So, they are adding to the index all the time. You do not pay to be indexed, but you should check that you are as the first step in your [SEO](#) strategy.

If you are not indexed, it probably means that your website is not Google-friendly, which relates to what we mentioned earlier in the handbook with Html and meta-elements. Making some changes to the webpage will help it be indexed and eventually improve its indexing over time making it easier to find by people using the search engine to find businesses like yours.

Being Google-friendly may take some small changes to your website. These changes cannot change how Google crawls you. Crawling is the term for how the Google bots find your website. You can only make your website easier for the bots to crawl:

- Create a logical website structure.
- Make sure your titles and headings are clear and precise.
- Ensure your written content on the page is clear and uses words that might match the language people searching may use. So, avoid lingo or jargon that your customers may not know.
- Make sure your pages all link back to each other, so there are no “dead ends.” This is called internal linking.
- Keep your website up to date.
- Get your page listed by or linked to other web pages that can also be crawled.
- [Generate and submit a sitemap to Google.](#)

Fortunately, more comprehensive help from Google is available, including how to do site mapping, which includes [Google’s SEO starter guide](#). Google wants you to be successful being found because that makes their search engine more successful. If searchers find what they need, they will keep using their product. Their guide provides information on getting noticed, staying relevant, and using their optimization tool called the Google Search Console.

Google is the dominant search engine. Google is paired with Android and iOS mobile operating systems. However, the native web browser on Apple is called Safari but its search engine is Google. Edge is the native browser on Windows-based desktops and laptops with Bing installed as the default search engine. Bing is Microsoft’s version of Google. Google has its own web browser called Chrome and many users install Chrome as their web browser over the default tools of Safari and Edge. So, while it is not as highly used as Google, Bing is a worthwhile search engine. Once you are up and running on Google, you can also learn optimization techniques with [Bing’s Webmaster Tools](#).

Overall, if SEO is not something you want to focus on, you can outsource these tasks. Often, however, SEO is included when you use an external service to build your website.

## **Scheduling and Booking**

Your farm-based business may offer services that require scheduling and booking. You can schedule things like tours, classes, events, tastings, or overnight stays online. It can get confusing, but it does not have to be.

Most customers do not like to call and want to feel control over their choices. Remember, even if you prefer doing things with a trusty pen and paper over the phone, it does not mean your customers do. One of the hardest parts about working in business is understanding a range of preferences and that just because it works for or appeals to you does not mean it will work for or appeal to others.

If you have a traditional pen and paper system of recording your appointments and stays in a guest book, it’s time to take it online. Customers prefer easy access to schedule and book

stays/events. They also increasingly prefer confirmation of their booking with access to cancel or change if needed. You might be missing sales because customers who may have wanted to book something could not do so online. This might be a missed transaction because they were ready to make a booking on their time instead of your hours of operation.

Also, when you allow customers to book through the online platforms where they see you, you create a more seamless process. The customer can view what you are offering and book using the same tool, rather than finding information on one tool and then switching to a different mode, like the phone, and then entering in their booking information manually using a pen and paper. Seamless scheduling also helps you with your staffing needs or ordering and contributes to delivering an easier and more enjoyable and quality experience to your guests.

If you use MS Office 365, you have access to an [app](#) in your suite of apps along with Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook called [Booking](#) (have a look, it might already be part of your package because, in some plans, it is standard). It is built to work with your other tools, like email, to manage, schedule, and book from any device connected to the internet.

Another booking and scheduling platform for small businesses is [Square](#). Square also has a mobile and on-site payment system covered in another section of this handbook. Square's individual package (if you have no employees) is free.

There are other free apps available for Google Workplace as add-ons to your G-Suite of apps in the [Google Workspace Marketplace](#). If you use an add-on app, sometimes called an extension, remember to read the reviews carefully before installing and going live with its use for your business.

Other scheduling and appointment systems also do marketing and promotion because they are also online experience marketplaces. We cover these in the next section.

### **Third-Party Commission-Based Online Booking Platform Systems**

There are several third-party services, called booking or reservation agents, that you can use to help sell things like experiences, events, or overnight stays. You may think of some of these as only for agri-lodging like farm stays and bed and breakfasts. However, these can also be used to list things like experiences, tours, performances, concerts, exhibitions, classes, events, and short-term or vacation rentals.

#### ***Airbnb***

It is beyond the scope of this handbook to recommend what [booking platform](#) is right for your agritourism operations. However, Airbnb is known for being the easiest platform for providers and consumers. It is the most widely available reservation system for experiences, vacation rentals, and overnight stays. You can learn more about Airbnb on its "[getting started](#)" webpage.

### **Eventbrite**

[Eventbrite](#) is for listing events, classes, and other experiences. If your event is free, then there is no charge for its event listing and booking services. Offering free events is a great way to encourage traffic on your farm to sell your merchandise. For example, host a cooking class or tasting event, and your students/customers have a chance to purchase your wares after the class or sign up for a more intensive package of classes.

### **Get your Event on Google**

You can also help get your event published in Google search results, requiring a bit more [search engine optimization](#) knowledge listed. The key to helping search engine users to find you is to follow the same SEO practices you do with your home page. If you list with Eventbrite, the great news is that it is already working to ensure that Google finds your event. Also, don't forget that your social channels are a great way to promote your events and experiences. Just make sure that you publish specific details that are consistent across all channels, with clear information on how visitors can contact you as the event organizer for more information. Otherwise, your customers might become frustrated and move on.

### **Other Booking Platforms**

The home-sharing and vacation rental market is becoming very competitive due to Airbnb's success. Airbnb did not create home rentals, but it made the booking process easier for hosts and guests. Many large online booking engines have products that are extensions of their larger search products. Keep these corporate umbrellas in mind as you consider third-party options as many of these are different products under one corporate parent. So, you may think that you are diversifying your booking options, but in fact, you are just extending into different brands under one corporate portfolio. Table 8 below summarizes how limited the choices are based on the three major corporate parents administering the various booking platform brands.

Corporate Parent	Some of its Brands
	Expedia Hotels.com VRBO Egencia Trivago Orbitz Travelocity Hotwire WOTif eBooker Cheaptickets Carentals.com ExpediaLocalExperiences ClassicVacations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FlipKey</li> <li>TheFork</li> <li>HouseTrip</li> <li>Jetsetter</li> <li>Seatguru.com</li> <li>Tripadvisor.com</li> <li>VacationHomeRentals</li> <li>Viator</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Booking.com</li> <li>Priceline.com</li> <li>Agoda</li> <li>Kayak</li> <li>Rentalcars.com</li> <li>OpenTable</li> </ul>

**Table 8**

Similar to using social channels, too many booking channels can become overwhelming. Keep in mind that you will pay a fee for each booking service. It is always best to encourage direct booking. This approach will save you money, which is best to pass on to your guest, so they see the benefit of working with you directly.

You do not have to provide all your availability to your booking agents. It is a good idea to block off days to the third party you can easily fill yourself. For example, weekends, holidays, or times when there is lots of traffic in your region for special events are usually easy to fill without a booking service. There is no point in paying a commission to an agency for booking something you can fill without them.

One strategy is to start with a third-party service and then phase it out. Some businesses will build loyalty and reputation and eventually discontinue their third-party subscription. However, read your terms and conditions carefully, as some platforms will continue to have the right to use your listing but make it appear as if it is fully occupied to drive interest to similar properties for existing subscribers.

Using any system outside your own also leaves you vulnerable to calendar confusion. Each channel will have a different booking calendar. For example, double booking means that you have reserved the room in two places with different guests. This mistake means that one guest may book directly with you on a Saturday night, and then another guest may book using Airbnb for the same night. Then both guests would show up for the same Saturday night for one room. Double-booking is a mess that not only hurts the guest but hurts your business.

Avoiding double booking is only one part of diligent [channel management](#). Another frustration for guests is when your pricing varies across your channels. Channel management can help you avoid double booking and make sure your prices are consistent. Some services will offer to manage your channels for an extra fee. This service may be worth the investment if you have a

high volume of bookings. However, enabling notifications and committing to your updating process is a good business habit.

When you get a booking notification, make sure you update across your other channels right away. Next, if you re-price on one channel, make sure you price consistently across the others. Your customer should know why the price is the lowest by calling directly or booking on your website. Dispel confusion by calling it the direct booking price, which makes it clear that they are saving you a booking or ticketing commission and therefore saving themselves some money too.

## Marketing Planning

Now that you know a lot more about marketing in general let's put some of that new knowledge to good use by making a marketing plan. A plan simply means you have some formal written steps for how you will market the business. A plan can be fluid but must include measurable outcomes. Otherwise, you don't really have a plan. You have a wish list.

### Importance of Branding

Your **brand** is your business's identity. It is not just a logo or a slogan. Consider McDonald's, one of the world's most recognizable brands. You know what to expect from their products and services. You know when you see those golden arches, you can approximate what will be on the menu, what the inside of the restaurant will look like, the speed of service, how you will be treated, the quality of the items you buy, and what you will pay. These expectations are how you perceive what they are selling. These expectations encompass the entire brand. The golden arches represent a symbol of those expectations.

The first step in branding is to establish the expectations you want your brand to communicate. That brand should be the focal point of your marketing plan.

### Creating a Marketing Plan

Keeping your brand in mind, you should begin to formulate the marketing plan using three steps: research, understand, and budget:

- **Research.**
  - Ask: who are your customers?
  - Become familiar with your market. What types of agritourism activities are popular or increasing in popularity? Notice where growth is taking place in the industry and the types of activities and goods consumers are seeking. What changes and developments in the agritourism market might be expected in the foreseeable future?

- **Understand.**
  - What makes your agritourism business unique? What would set you apart from competitors? What is your niche?
- **Budget.**
  - A rule of thumb for a beginning agritourism operation is that 10 to 30 percent of gross revenue should be invested in marketing.

Planning is the anticipation of the future, which means you should rely on informed decision-making. To make informed decisions, you need to monitor what you are doing right and wrong through monitoring and feedback.

### **Ongoing Monitoring and Feedback**

Once a business is in place and operating, it is important to ensure that it operates as efficiently as possible. Measuring efficiency requires some form of tool that can measure how the business operates from your visitors' perspective, such as a visitor survey.

A survey is a quick and easy way to get feedback from your existing customers, employees, or potential customers. Aim to include about 10 questions. There are several basic question types. Questions can be closed or open. Closed means you give the respondent a list of options from which to choose. Open means they fill in short phrases or sentences. Questions can be single responses or multiple responses. You may ask a simple yes or no question, or you might use a rating question.

Free online tools such as Survey Monkey make electronic surveys economical and straightforward. Other free tools include MS Forms or Google Forms in Google Workspace.

To get started with Survey Monkey, visit the [website](#). The basic plan is free and is a great way to get started. There are many templates built into Survey Monkey to help you. These services will also summarize the results so you can quickly get the information you need.

Surveys are good for answering questions about the people who choose to visit your agritourism site. Some questions that you might have could be:

- In general, who are my visitors?
- Where do my visitors come from?
- Why are they visiting this area?
- What other activities are my visitors interested in?
- How often do they visit?
- What are their favorite activities at my site?
- How did they find out about my business?

You can ask almost anything that is relevant to improving the services offered at your operation. When you develop a survey, have several people read it to make sure that it is easy to understand. Each question should have a specific purpose, and the structure of the question should directly achieve that purpose. For example, “What was the main method of transportation you used to get here?” is a direct question. Providing response choices gives a list of categories that are of interest to your business. If most visitors travel by car, then advertising on billboards or through brochures at hotels and visitor centers might be a good method of marketing communication.

Basic demographic questions are good survey questions. Demographics are anything that has to do with population statistics, such as information that the U.S. Census would look for (including age, income, education, or household status). We ask these types of questions because, in large groups, guests can have more predictable behaviors, which allows us to understand them better.

Think about your behaviors and interests at different times in your life. You act differently based on something as general as your age and the available income at the time. For example, guests with small children have different needs and interests than those who might be traveling as a retired couple. When we can understand our guests better, we can do a better job of meeting their needs. As a result, they will be more satisfied and spread good word of mouth about our business, driving more sales. Research is also an opportunity to learn what we are doing right and wrong and any opportunities to increase our revenue.

Marketing questions are also important in surveys. You may ask a simple question like “How did you hear about us?”, listing some options for the respondents. The most popular answer to this question is likely to be your best advertising opportunity. Or it may indicate a place where you are advertising that is not getting enough notice. Lack of notice might indicate that this is not a good, continued marketing expense.

Often survey questions are multiple-choice, but questions can also be open-ended. An open-ended question provides a blank space for respondents to write in an answer. Use open-ended questions cautiously since they have the potential to draw a wide variety of responses.

Surveys should seek to discover what is common among most of the people who visit your business. Open-ended questions work well when there are too many possible answers to provide in a multiple-choice format. Sometimes open-ended questions are useful when you do not know how your visitors feel about something. For more help building insight through surveys, please visit the section on [Ongoing Monitoring and Feedback](#).

## **The Research Process and Interpretation**

Once you have survey results, you need to make use of them. The steps in research can be simple or complex depending on who will view the results and the degree of specificity

required. Figure 14 below shows the progression of the research process from recognizing the problem to data [interpretation](#).

## The Stages of Research

Research is just structured "finding out"

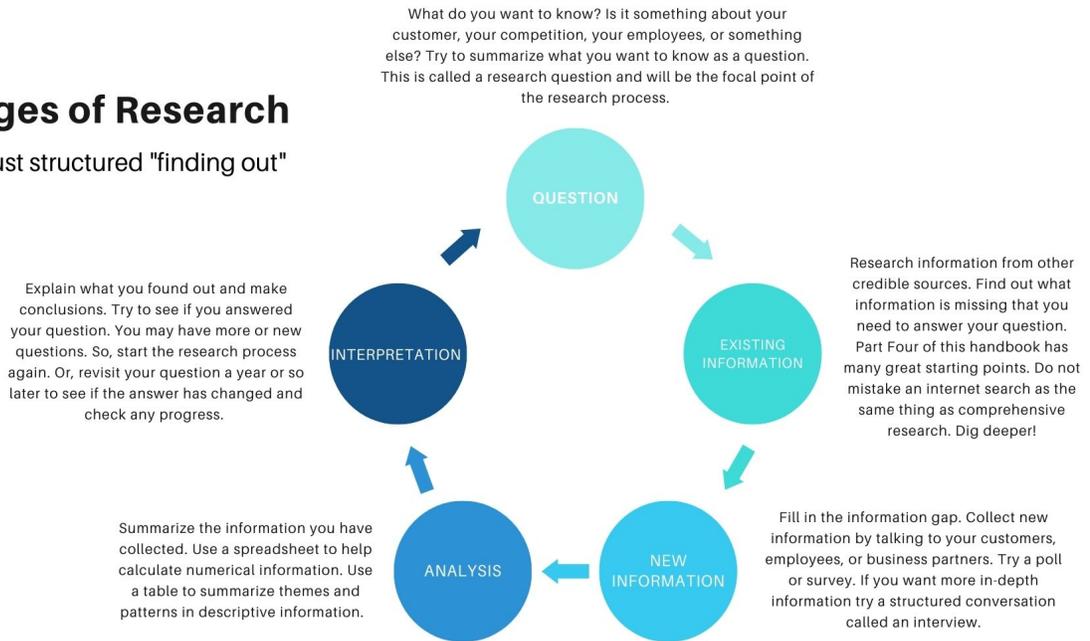


Figure 14

As visitors return surveys, you can begin to analyze the information they provide. A simple method for compiling results is to tally the number of times a response is selected and then compare this total to the number of submitted surveys. For example, suppose that 40 surveys are returned in a study.

Suppose that you when the surveys are collected, you see that you have 28 responses from those identifying as female. In this case, the procedure is to divide 28 by 40 and multiply the answer by 100. The new percentage of female respondents would be 70 percent.

Female customers: .....28 out of 40

This information can be useful in identifying opportunities to attract new visitors. In this example, your survey shows that you have 70 percent female and 30 percent male visitors. This result could mean that you might want to work toward finding activities that will attract male customers if a male visitation rate of 30 percent seems very low. Or it might mean that you are reaching your target market well. How you apply the information to your business decisions depends on your business goals. Collecting this type of information is all about making informed decisions. It is not about making decisions for you, personally.

Survey information can be particularly useful for marketing. Assuming a survey return of 40 respondents, consider the example survey question.

**Which of the following do you use as a source of information for planning a trip/vacation (select all that apply)?**

- TV ad     newspaper ad     magazine ad
- radio ad     friend/relative     business colleague
- travel/visitor guide/brochure     happened to stop by
- Internet                       Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Out of the 40 Surveys:**

Internet .....	24 out of 40
Travel/Visitor Guide/ Brochure.....	13 out of 40
Friend/Relative.....	10 out of 40
Other .....	4 out of 40
Newspaper Ad.....	2 out of 40
Happened to stop by.....	1 out of 40
Magazine Ad .....	1 out of 40
Radio Ad .....	1 out of 40
Business Colleague.....	0 out of 40
TV Ad .....	0 out of 40

The example above reveals that most survey respondents use the internet, visitor guides, and advice of friends or relatives as a source of information for planning vacations. From this information, it seems clear that you should advertise primarily with the internet and visitor guides. Increasing promotion through the advice of friends and relatives will depend on the quality of service you provide to customers.

Keep in mind, the more people who respond to a survey, the more your results will represent the group of people you are studying. So, aim to collect as many responses as possible. An online survey should run for about two weeks. You will get the bulk of the responses in the first week. Then, a reminder post such as “if you have not already answered our survey, we would sincerely appreciate your feedback” will usually encourage a few more stragglers to the respond. Always make sure there is a clear end to the survey by closing your survey form and posting the dates of availability of the survey. Make sure your respondents know that you value their time and input in the survey process.

You can also use survey tools like a comment box connected to your website. This may help the customer see that you are open to feedback. This openness and access can prevent frustrated customers from taking negative comments to review sites with their poor experience. If you use a comment box or internal product review process, make sure you check them frequently.

Sending valid concerns into the emptiness of cyberspace without a reply could make an already frustrated customer more frustrated.

Analyzing data can be a very complex topic. This section has only covered a simple method of analysis in an attempt to provide practical advice. If you find you need help with more advanced research methods, contact the [Small Business Development Center](#) nearest you.

## Thinking from a Mission-Oriented Perspective

A [mission](#) statement can be used to ground and guide the focus of your business. A mission statement must be clear and specific. It is a condensed statement of the mission of your business. A mission statement does not have to be complex. Its simplicity is what makes it effective.

Here are some examples from some of the world's top tourism companies:

- *"To provide authentic hospitality by making a difference in the lives of the people we touch every day."* Hyatt.
- *"Develop and create extraordinary experiences. Provide consistent and outstanding guest service."* MGM Resorts International
- *"To help people around the world plan and have the perfect trip."* TripAdvisor.
- *"Dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and Company Spirit."* Southwest Airlines.

These companies are successful in part due to the focal point provided by a straightforward mission statement. You can establish your mission by understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your business through a technique called a SWOT analysis, which we cover next.

## SWOT Analysis

[SWOT](#) is a simple but useful framework for analyzing your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Analysis means breaking things into smaller parts so that we can understand a more complex whole. A SWOT analysis is a specific type of business analysis that is simply a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This list is used as a tool to determine if you are meeting your business's mission. It helps you build on what you do well, address what you're lacking, minimize risks, and take the greatest possible advantage of chances for success. Figure 15 contains an example of how to get started with your SWOT analysis.

# Get started with your SWOT

## Your Mission Statement

### SWOT Step One

You can start a SWOT analysis simply with a piece of paper and a line down the middle. Write your business mission across the top.

On the left list the things that go on inside the control of your business that helps support your mission. This is called the **internal environment**.

On the right, list things that affect your business mission but are not within the control of your business. This is the **external environment**.

Use some of these questions to help you start your list of things.

Finally, you will do the next step of your SWOT by further separating internal and external into things that **help** your mission and those that **harm** your mission.

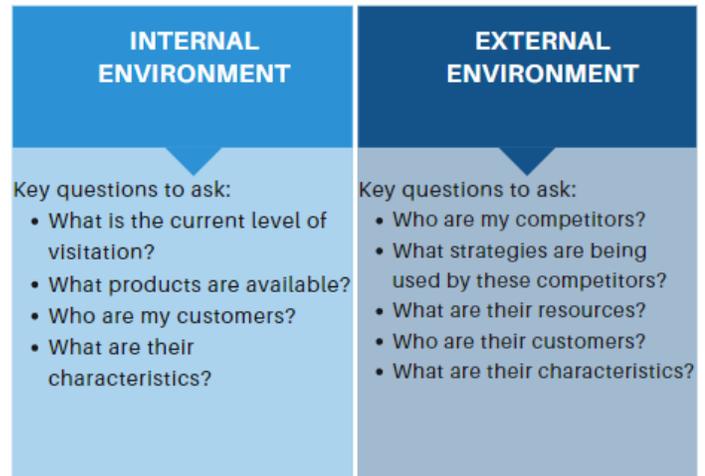


Figure 15 (Adopted from Weaver and Lawton, 2014)

To get started creating your SWOT analysis, start with a two-column list. Work through each of the questions in Figure 15 to get started. You can ask other questions about the internal and external environments of your business. The internal and external environment must properly support the business mission.

Next, take each column and divide it into two halves. One of the spaces will focus on what is helpful and the other that is harmful to your business. Use figure 16 as a guide to developing each one of your boxes. It does not have to be fancy or typed like the diagram. A good old-fashioned notebook page and a pencil are great starting points for a SWOT analysis.

In a SWOT analysis, you are essentially writing down what is helpful and what is harmful to your business from the inside and outside. Breaking things into separate parts like this helps you understand the whole picture better, which makes it less overwhelming. When we have smaller parts to work with, we can work through problems and see our successes because they are not in a big jumble.

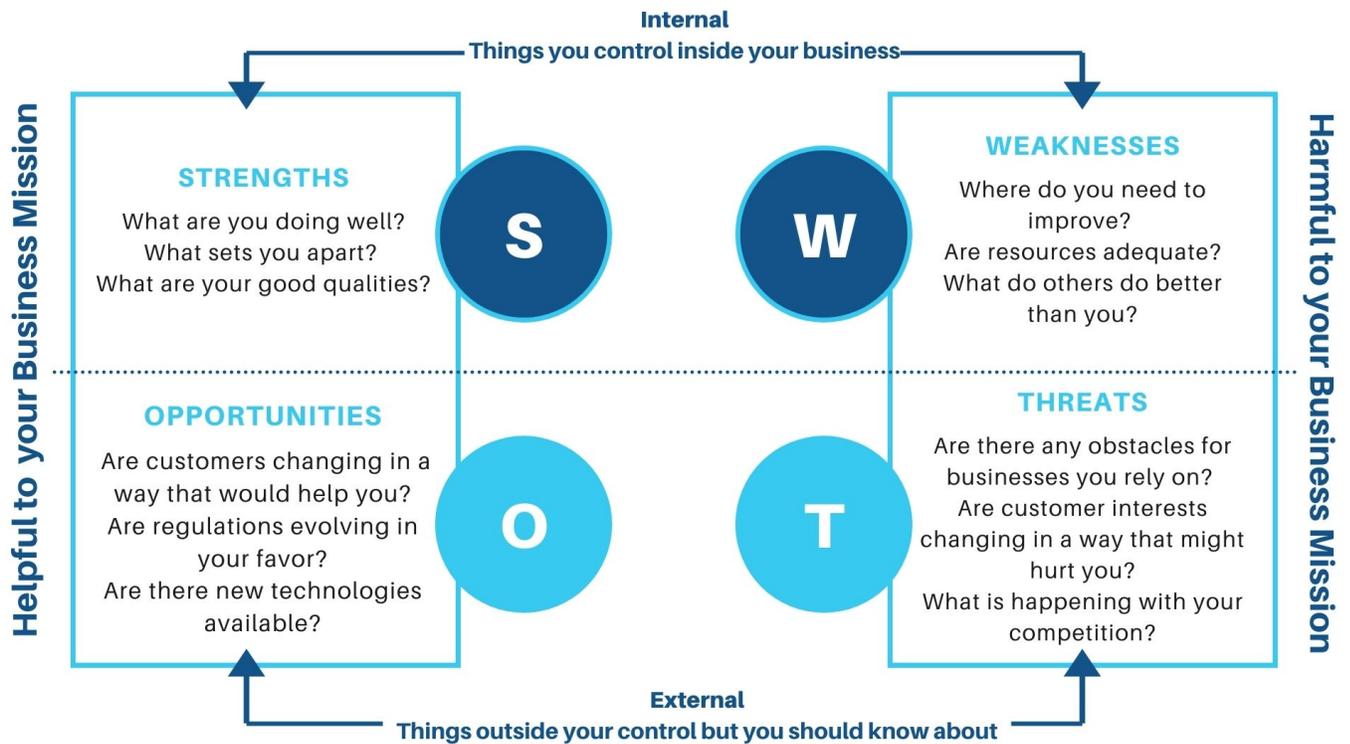


Figure 16

Here are some examples from each category:

### Strengths

- Unique among other farm businesses in area.
- Steady visitor volume.
- Great customer service.

### Weaknesses

- High insurance costs.
- No off-season revenue.
- High seasonal staff turnover.

### Opportunities

- Other farmers may have an interest in a cooperative.
- Schools in area interested in visiting.
- Large urban areas a short drive away.

### Threats

- Rising cost of fuel.
- Future overdevelopment.
- Changes in development.

Make sure that the items of focus in your analysis are consistent with your mission statement. Items that do not pertain to the mission of your business may not be a good use of time. The goal is to identify those items that can be the greatest benefit to your operation and the

community. SWOT analyses can focus on specific topics that need improvement or on the entire business.

Tools like this can aid you in seeing the “forest AND the trees” by forcing you to step a bit outside of your daily environment and see the “big picture.” When you conduct this analysis for your business, you should try to be as thorough as possible. After completing the analysis, your goal will be to eliminate or manage items in the Weaknesses and Threats categories. Additionally, you should try to develop Opportunities into Strengths. Again, with any business tool, the point is to make informed decisions and not let the tool do the decision-making for you.

## **Increasing Revenue**

### **Increasing Revenue: Great Service**

There is a relationship between repeat visits and transactions. As more people visit your location more often, the level of revenue from business will increase (see Figure 17). To increase revenue, focus on maximizing visitor volume to a number that your business can handle. Ensure that the practices of your business encourage customers to return in the future.

Some businesses reward repeat customers with discounts. Incentives to encourage repeat business may help to increase revenue, particularly if your business sells items on-site in gift shops or concessions. Repeat business can be a powerful revenue builder that you can use to stimulate growth. The most effective way to encourage repeat business is by making sure you deliver quality customer service. The more satisfied your customer is, the more likely they are to return and to spread good information about your business through word of mouth.

## Relationship between number of visits and transactions



Figure 17

### The Importance of Customer Service Before, During, and After the Transaction

The two most important groups of people associated with operating a new business are employees and customers. Employees and customers are essential because the interaction between these two groups is a critical factor in exchanging supply and demand, where monetary transactions occur. The Human Resources section of this handbook covered the employee side of this relationship. This section briefly approaches the importance of customer service.

When associating with customers, good communication is vital to ensure successful interaction. Concerning customer service, make sure employees who directly interact with visitors meet the following qualifications:

- The employee presents a generally friendly and welcoming attitude toward visitors.
- The employee is confident when communicating with visitors (good eye contact, smiles, appropriate greeting, etc.). Good communicators can be a powerful force in the growth of your business.
- Good communication includes strong listening skills. Sometimes listening is what the customer needs the most.
- The employee treats the visitor as a valuable person and not just *another* customer.
- The employee is willing to make every attempt to meet reasonable customer requests.
- The employee is adequately trained and competent at performing their position

- The employee understands the proper way to receive telephone calls, respond to emails, or respond to any communication that might happen with customers if this task is a part of the job. Speaking on the telephone is not the same as face-to-face communication. The same is true for email communications. To safeguard the image of your business, you must ensure that your personnel can perform these tasks to the standard you desire to achieve. You might have them send you a formal email to assess their performance in this area. Perhaps this is a good topic for training.
- All employees must understand that it is inappropriate to argue with each other or behave unprofessionally at work, especially in front of customers. It is also unprofessional to discuss the transactions, management policies, sales, revenue targets, or any other business operation particulars with guests present.
- Does your business meet the expectations of the way most customers expect to be treated? If not, then you must determine what is missing from your customer service training and strategy.

## **Getting Unsolicited Feedback**

Using surveys for market research is not the only way people will tell you how you are doing. People have more ways than ever to provide feedback about your goods and services. Sometimes, our customers are unhappy with us, and they will choose to let the internet know through an online review. Online reviews are a necessary headache that small businesses must navigate. Whether your customers love or hate something, those reviews are ways that other customers might make decisions about your business. Taking charge of your online reputation is the best way to let the reviews work for you.

Online reviews are just one of many ways that your customers will give you feedback. However, these are the easiest and most common ways your customer can feel heard. Customers may review you through Google Review, Yelp, TripAdvisor, or dozens of other platforms. Reviews can be good or bad for your business. In some cases, the online review can affect your page position in your search results to be noticed by other customers. Sometimes, the online review can make your business appear less appealing overall.

Negative online feedback is often hard to navigate because you are an extension of your business. If people do not care for your business, it can seem like they don't care for you either. However, the best way to manage it is not to take it too personally if it is bad. Take a deep breath and allow that natural defensiveness to pass. However, it is essential not to ignore reviews, good or bad. They all have some value, even if that value is to remind you that you will never please 100 percent of customers 100 percent of the time.

## **A Culture of Feedback**

Being open to feedback will help you adopt an environment of continuous improvement. Your staff will hear many comments from customers every day, both good and bad. Ask your staff to note these comments so they can help guide your future business decisions.

To make it easy and convenient to provide feedback, provide numerous channels, such as comment cards, email, and online surveys. Be sure to promote these options on all customer communications materials, including through email, social media, signs, and by simply asking.

When customers give you feedback, show appreciation rather than treating it as unwelcome. To ensure that customers feel comfortable providing feedback, train and empower your employees to solve problems and address complaints effectively. Allowing anonymous feedback can also encourage customers that feel embarrassed to be more comfortable alerting you to a problem or extending their thanks.

As the face of your business, you should also check in with your guests regularly too. Taking a personal and personable approach is a great way to get feedback. Just make sure you ask in an authentic way that does not lead the guest to answer one way or the other. Consider the difference between these questions upon check out or at the end of a transaction:

- “I trust you had an amazing stay?”
- “Wasn't the tour wonderful?”
- “Aren't these prints gorgeous?”

These types of questions are called leading questions because you are leading the respondents to the answer you want to hear.

Consider these more objective options instead:

- “How was your stay?”
- “How did we do on today's tour?”
- “Did you enjoy the prints you bought from us?”

If you have a formal feedback approach, encourage guests to fill out your form or do an online review. Similar to avoiding leading in-person questions, also do not lead the feedback or review process. You can gently explain that you know their time is valuable but that their feedback is also valuable. You can do this directly at the point of transaction or indirectly by posting a sign at the register or by using your receipts or other transaction communications, like an order confirmation email. When you show your customers that you value their input, it builds a positive relationship with them, increasing their loyalty to your business.

## **Understanding Complaints**

Complaints can be uncomfortable, but they usually have a reason. Customers generally complain for these main reasons:

- To seek compensation.
- To vent their frustration.
- To improve the product/service.
- To spare other customers from a similar experience or, most rarely,

- They will never be satisfied, no matter what (Kotler, 2017).

You can probably relate to your own customer service experiences that typically you are not likely to complain if you are dissatisfied. Research supports this demonstrating that less than 10 percent of unhappy customers will complain (Kotler, 2017). This pattern is usually because the poor product or service is not terrible enough for people to take the time to complain. So, never think that a lack of complaints means everything is fine.

## Effective Service Recovery

One of the biggest challenges in offering tourism, recreation, and hospitality experiences on your property is that these are services. Being in the service business means that you are selling something that is produced at the same time it is consumed because agritourism is part of a large group of the larger service industry.

Services are different from traditional goods. Think about an example of a traditional product like a pair of socks. Socks are made at the sock factory, which is probably far away from where customers buy and wear them. If something goes wrong while making the socks at the sock factory, they are removed from the production line and never reach the consumer. With services, production mistakes cannot be undone in this same way because you are the agritourism factory, and your consumers are in the factory. Again, service mistakes generally cannot be undone with services.

You can make sure that you reduce production mistakes with any goods you sell. For example, if you sell socks with homespun alpaca wool from your farm, you would make sure that you did not display or sell items that have big holes in them. However, what if you are offering a tour of the Alpaca enclosure and one spits at the visitors. Since the experience of the tour is being produced as the visitors are on it, you cannot undo the Alpaca goo, but you can still try to ensure that the negative event does not create an overall bad experience if the customer complains.

Fixing mistakes can help you retain your customers. Repairing mistakes is called [service recovery](#). Many dissatisfied customers who do not complain may still buy from you in the future. However, if the customer complained and the issue was resolved to their satisfaction, research shows they are far more likely to buy from you because you are committed to their satisfaction. Therefore, resolving complaints is not just about the original negative event or experience. It is about [customer retention](#).

There are several steps to take to retain your customers. Be responsive, empathetic, and assuring when dealing with customer complaints. When you are responsive, you show that you are reacting to the complaint quickly and that you will rectify the service with some type of action. Sometimes action simply means offering your commitment to do better. Empathy means that you do not argue with the customer. You make sure that they feel heard. Being a

good listener does not require you to admit fault. When you are assuring, you give the customer confidence that you are listening.

## **When Negative Feedback Goes Public**

Social media provides a very instant and very public means for customers to share their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with your products and services. Even if you are not active on social media, your customers likely are. So, take control of your online presence because customers will contribute to your online reputation with or without you. It is important to be responsive to both types of reviews.

Part of controlling negative information is to make sure the customer knows where to go if there is a problem. A customer who has a clear path to remedying their concerns is less likely to make their dissatisfaction public. The more you monitor your online presence, the more control you will have over the impression it gives to new and existing customers.

A commitment to customer service means that you try to prevent errors before they happen. Service recovery means that you commit to making it right if something goes wrong. Monitor common customer review sites and make sure you respond to customer complaints in the order they are received. This can deescalate the complaint's public nature and show other readers of the complaint that you are committed to making it right.

Consider this hypothetical example of a customer posting to TripAdvisor about your farm. These would appear as a mention. You can respond to mentions or reviews on most platforms like Google or Yelp as a verified representative of that business.

*“Awful hayride. Like 40 people must’ve been on this wagon. It was cramped and bumpy. Terrible!”*

The worst way to respond is by being defensive. You may think, well, of course, it was crowded and bumpy. First, it was a busy weekend. Next, it is a wagon on a rutted pasture path. Once you have collected yourself, you should remember your rules of responsiveness, empathy, and assurance.

These three qualities are in this hypothetical response:

*“We were so sorry to hear you didn’t have a great ride. It seems that many people had the same idea this weekend as it was one of our busiest of the whole season. The best time for an uncrowded ride is on weekdays. We hope you come back and see us again.”*

Acting quickly, especially within a day or two of the mention, shows responsiveness. By acknowledging their specific problem, you show you heard their complaint. It’s not vague but specific to their concern. You were specific about the ride. By offering the information about the business, you offer an explanation and assurance that this is not a typical situation. For the

reader of the complaint, you have shown them that you take concerns seriously, there is a reasonable explanation, and you have helped them have realistic expectations about your business.

There are five logical steps to remember in the service recovery process:

- Anticipating customer needs
- Acknowledging their feelings
- Apologizing and owning the responsibility
- Offering alternatives
- Making amends
- Learn from the experience.

One way to be anticipatory is to stay in touch with your visitors, which we cover next.

### ***Staying in Touch and Building Insight***

One part of understanding your visitor is to keep track of their information in the customer database. This information can be through your reservation system, a guest sign-in book, comment card, inquires, or a record of transactions. You do not need to know advanced computing to centralize your customer database.

A customer database is a place where you store information about your customers. You can use paper-based records or streamline this into an electronic database with a spreadsheet product like MS Excel. Never let good information go to waste.

When you maintain a customer database, you get access to two important types of information. One is about the overall customer or smaller customer groups. The second is about the individual. This information empowers you to take charge of informed decision-making for your farm-based enterprise.

Knowing group traits allows you to understand your customers so you can make informed decisions about what is working or not. Individual information allows you to personalize information to the individual so that you can build a relationship with that customer. This personalization will also allow you to also reach out with promotions, specials, discounts, or reminders to those most likely receptive to that offer.

### **Customer Satisfaction through Interpretation**

When visitors are informed about what they are experiencing, they tend to value it more. This relationship leads to increased customer satisfaction, builds confidence in your products, helps manage customer expectations, and increases loyalty. There are different ways to encourage your customers to learn about your farm, experiences, and products. When you explain things to customers, it is called [interpretation](#). The word interpretation is very fitting because it is a

type of translation. You are translating your knowledge and expertise about agriculture so that an everyday person can understand it.

Interpretation can be static or dynamic. Static interpretation means it does not interact with the visitor; it is still. Static interpretation includes things like signs, audio narration, or electronic or printed material. Dynamic interpretation involves more interaction through a person or interpreter, such as a demonstration or guided tour. Dynamic interpretation tends to get more attention and better, more lasting outcomes. However, it is less practical. Therefore, static interpretation can still be a wonderful way to educate your guests.

There are many ways to help inform your customers. Some examples include publishing the health benefits of your product, how your supply chain works, describing the animal behavior, explaining seasonal farming practices, advising on food preparation, or the nutritional value of farm-based products. Often this information can be on-site such as outside a paddock or field, or through your social media channels. Many streams of interpretative information will appeal to a wide variety of users for a maximum positive effect.

### **Increasing Loyalty by Building Engagement**

In addition to interpretation, there are many other ways to increase loyalty to your business. Loyal customers are more likely to be return customers and spread positive word-of-mouth about your products or experiences.

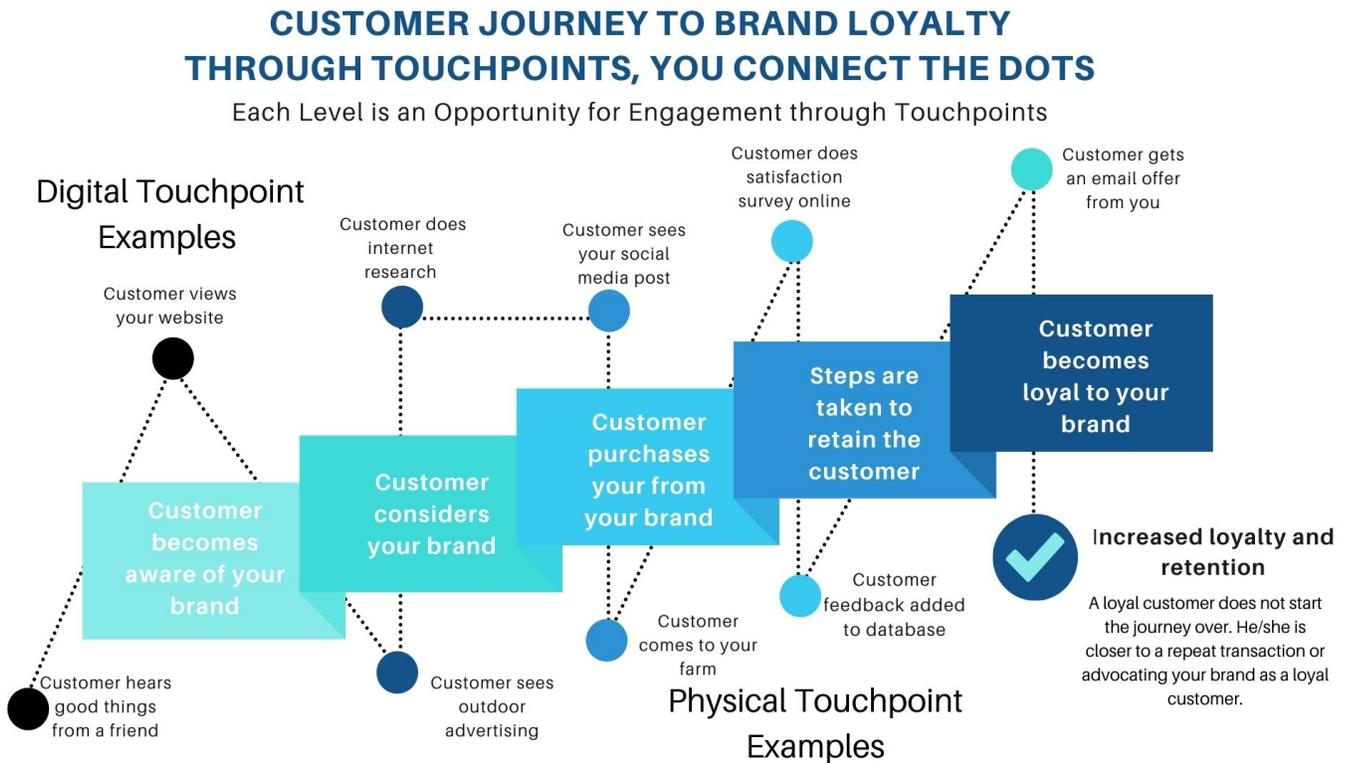
Several measures of customer loyalty can help you track the value of your loyalty efforts. When you can collect customer information, you should. Data are critical for informed decision-making.

There are some important terms to know to understand loyalty. Customer retention refers to the customers who came back for another transaction. These are also called repeat or return customers.

Loyalty is built over time, and this journey begins with understanding your touchpoints. Each contact with the customer is called a touchpoint. Each touchpoint is an opportunity for engagement, which means creating a positive or positively meaningful interaction. Engagement means showing them something that creates a meaningful impression and connection between you and the customer. Effective engagement can create and maintain loyalty.

Each means of communication with a guest is called a [channel](#), just like there are different channels on a TV. [Touchpoints](#) are communicated through channels. Touchpoints can be digital or physical. For example, a Facebook post is a digital touchpoint. Just imagine a product or service of which you may consider yourself loyal. You might be able to remember the different touchpoints that created that loyalty. It probably was not one thing but a repetition of things that built your loyalty over time.

Repetition of contact creates the customer journey. This customer journey is illustrated in Figure 18. The mix of touchpoints is not in a straight line. These touchpoints vary. Use this diagram to think about your customer’s journey toward loyalty. Consider if you are offering adequate touchpoints and engagement to generate loyalty.



**Figure 18**

Building loyalty does not mean you need a complicated loyalty program. A big program with a big budget does not mean big results. Think about your wallet or shopping history as an example. You probably have more than one reward or shopper card for the same type of stores, like groceries or drug stores. You want the savings the rewards or shopper accounts offer. However, it does not make you stop shopping at that business’s competitors. You probably have a reward card or key tag from them too. Therefore, a complex loyalty program is not necessary to necessarily secure loyalty.

Instead of thinking of it like a “rewards” or “loyalty” program, think of it as a relationship management system or a customer connectedness program. A loyalty program can start as simply as an email distribution or mailing list, which means you have a list of customers that get communication from you. Here are some tips for reaching your loyal customers:

- 1) Use loyalty members as a sounding board. Those in your loyalty group can be candidates to test out new offers, ideas, products, or events. Measure their response to see if an idea might be a hit.
- 2) Cross-promote other things you are offering or announce events. These members are a captive audience for you. Keep them captive. So, don't send them too much unsolicited communication. You don't want to appear solicitous, which means you've become a nuisance in their email inbox.
- 3) Show who you are and what your business represents. Customers like to connect with businesses that are [purpose-driven](#), which means you represent something they also value. That might be something like sustainable farming, protecting animals, organic eating, fair trade, farm values, or creative expression.
- 4) Remember to use all of your channels to build loyalty. Social media comes with a built-in loyalty program because people will follow or friend you. Think of your social media followers like an automatic loyalty club.
- 5) Compare your loyalty members to transactions and overall transactions. Through this comparison, you can begin to calculate loyalty. Calculations can give your perspective on how well a product, campaign, communications, strategy, or product is doing. Use this as an opportunity to build an insight into your target market or to build new growth opportunities.

An email list can start simply by creating a contact group in your email. This way, no one knows how many people are on the list and cannot see everyone's email address. If you prefer to send out print materials, you can use customer's physical addresses, but remember, emails don't require the cost of paper, envelopes, or stamps.

If you like the idea of sending something in traditional mail, like a postcard or brochure, maybe save that expense for something extra special. Also, for regular mail, anything in an envelope is more likely to get tossed in the recycle bin unopened, so opt for things that are sturdy and do not need an outer envelope, like a trifold or postcard where the address is applied right to the mail piece.

As your loyal customers grow and you continue to engage with them, you may want to explore a web-based platform that can help you stay organized with your email outreach. A few that are reputable and economical are:

- [Constant Contact](#)
- [Mail Chimp](#)

These types of services also include analytics to help you understand the effectiveness of your outreach campaigns. Other features in these services include customer relationship management tracking, templates for designing how your social posts or emails will look and

allow you to schedule your communication. This way, communication still goes out when things get hectic.

***More reading on Using Email Groups:***

- [Managing Outlook Email Groups](#)
- [Managing Gmail Groups](#)

## **Additional Revenue Opportunities: Farm-retail Merchandising**

Agritourism can sell a range of goods or services direct to the consumer (sometimes called [D2C](#)). Goods are things that the customer can take home with them, like a t-shirt or a jar of jam. Services are experiences that the visitor enjoys, like a tour or an overnight stay. Both goods and services provide merchandising opportunities.

You may offer unique products from your farm-based business that users want to enjoy at home or give as gifts. For experiences, your clients may want something to remember their time to take with them as a souvenir or to support something that your business represents. You can sell on your property, your website, or through a recognized online marketplace. An online marketplace is like putting up a roadside stand or a vendor booth at your local market; it's just on the internet.

An example of a widely used and reputable online marketplace is the website [Etsy.com](#). Etsy is a marketplace for handmade and unique items sold by individuals and small businesses. You do not need a special license to sell on Etsy, but you need to check you're required to follow any laws that apply to you as a small business selling online.

To learn about opening a shop on Etsy, visit the [seller's page](#) of their website. Etsy will provide ways to process your transactions, track your business, and promote across social media. You can monitor your online store from your computer or any mobile device, which gives you an extension of your farm-based business even when you are off the farm.

Etsy provides an online structure for the seller and an easy-to-search system for buyers. When you use a third-party platform like Etsy, you will pay seller fees because it is providing you with an electronic storefront and access to customers. There are similar electronic marketplaces to Etsy, such as [Zazzle](#), [Shopify](#), and [ArtFire](#).

### ***Other Direct to Consumer Off-farm Retailing***

Direct-to-consumer sales come in many forms, which can include farm markets. One source of information is the national [Farmers Market Coalition](#). The coalition webpage provides resources, news, and networking opportunities.

Additionally, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture have partnered to offer farm retail outlets at the plazas of New Stanton, Sideling Hill, and Allentown. The market season runs from April 1 to November 30 every year. To be eligible, you must apply 30 days in advance using the [online application form](#), where you will also find the vendor agreement and application.

No matter where you retail in a farm market setting, being a farm market vendor with food means you must follow the rules of the Pennsylvania Department of [Agriculture's Retail Food License](#) program.

***Further Reading on Off-Farm Retailing:***

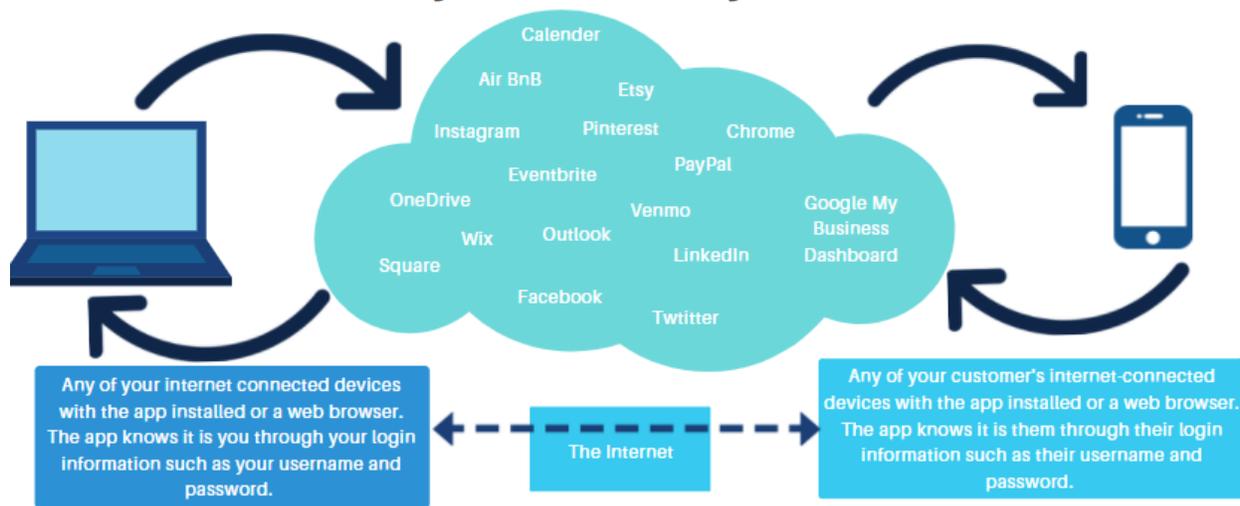
- [Pennsylvania Direct Farm Business Guide available from the National Ag Law Center](#)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Farmers Markets Frequently Asked Questions](#)

## **Managing Payments**

Whether you're managing transactions on or off the farm, mobile and online payments are becoming a must for small businesses, since people carry less cash on them and often pass on a purchase if there is no cashless payment option. Fortunately, getting paid for your goods or services is easier than ever. However, it can still be a little confusing. It is important to have payment options for customers, but that does not mean you have to go to the expense of having a dedicated credit card terminal or costly equipment rental from your bank. All you need is access to the internet. The same computer, tablet, or phone that you use to check email can process mobile payments without any special equipment.

Two of the most popular mobile pay platforms are PayPal and Venmo. Many customers will have one or both of these types of payment accounts. These payment options are touch-free and mobile using your business's QR code or username. QR codes work just like bar codes do on items at the grocery store and identify your business with a simple scan from your customer's mobile device. Your unique username can be used likewise to identify you as a payee. Anywhere you have a connection to make a call on your smartphone, you can process payment like on the trail, at the farmers market, in the field, or at the barn! So, you can send and receive money anywhere that you have a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet. These payment systems are safe and secure for you and your guest. Since there is tracking and encryption, these are generally considered more secure than physical cash.

## Manage your Business from Any Device, Anywhere



Information is exchanged via the internet. It does not exist on either user's device. The app on your device allows the communication or transaction to take place through the internet. You do not need a dedicated device for any app, including your payments.

Figure 19

Mobile payment services are not free. However, you do not pay monthly fees or have to carry a minimum balance as you do with a traditional bank account, even though it can be completely connected to withdraw and transfer funds from any bank account. PayPal makes money by the commission fee they take from each transaction. Although there is a transaction charge, research has indicated that a mobile payment button on your website has an 82 percent higher chance of turning a looker into a buyer (PayPal.com, 2020).

Most payment vendors, like PayPal, will take a processing fee from each transaction. However, many business owners find the convenience and tracking information well worth the fees for each transaction. These fees are much less than a designated Visa or Mastercard terminal transaction, but your customer can still use their Visa, Mastercard, American Express, or personal bank account as their funding source. These payment platforms are also great for customers that visit your farm in groups because there are options to let customers split payments and leave tips.

One concern that some people have about services like Venmo, or PayPal is understanding how to access their money. It can be harder to visualize because there is not always that physical exchange of dollars or swipe of a card. However, the electronic transfer of money using a swiped card, money orders, or checks works the same way as PayPal or Venmo. The card, money order, or check is just a representation of money. It's not actual money. It's a way to recognize a withdrawing and depositing account. That is what a mobile payment system does too.

Accessing your funds is easy using an online payment system. For example, the balance you have in PayPal can stay in PayPal to pay your business expenses online using your PayPal login or by using the card that PayPal issues when you open the account. Or you can transfer your PayPal funds to your traditional bank account anytime. If you ever need a person to talk you through the steps, customer support is available to walk you through the set-up steps.

There are over a dozen other reputable payment management options, but Google Pay, Venmo, Apple Pay, Zelle, or Square are the most widely recognized. Some payment platforms will have a small card reader adapter that plugs into your device like you would plug in wired headphones. These are simple to install and provide access to those who prefer to use their physical credit or debit card. Each vendor comes equipped with tools to help you track, process, manage, link to your website or online marketplace, and promote your goods and services online.

[Payment solutions](#) will include contactless payment. Furthermore, you can make anything you can imagine on a sign or brochure into a Quick Response or QR code that guests can scan with their phone and read like menus, rules, animal facts, craft ideas, recipes – there are so many options! QR codes work like a bar code at a store register. No special technology is needed for users, just a smartphone. You do not need anything special either – there are many free online QR code generators. Most mobile payment systems like PayPal, Square, and Apple Pay come ready to help you set up your QR code payments.

### ***More on QR Codes***

[QR codes](#) are easy to use. It's as easy for the guest as point and click because it uses the phone's camera. It's as easy for you as no more wasted paper materials and fewer high-touch areas to clean. If you do not want to use QR codes for payment, you can still use this tool to communicate with your guests or seek their feedback.

Consider:

- [Flowcode](#)
- [QR Code Generator](#)
- [QR Code Monkey](#)
- [UQRMe](#)
- [Visualead](#)

To create a QR code, there are a range of free and paid plans available, depending on your needs. A paid plan can include personalized touches like your logo or brand color scheme (called a brand palette). Your Office Suite Apps for Microsoft, such as Outlook and Forms, also have QR code generators to digitize things like your contact information or link to an online form. You can also right-click your mouse in Google to create QR codes easily from visual information (see Figures 20 and 21).

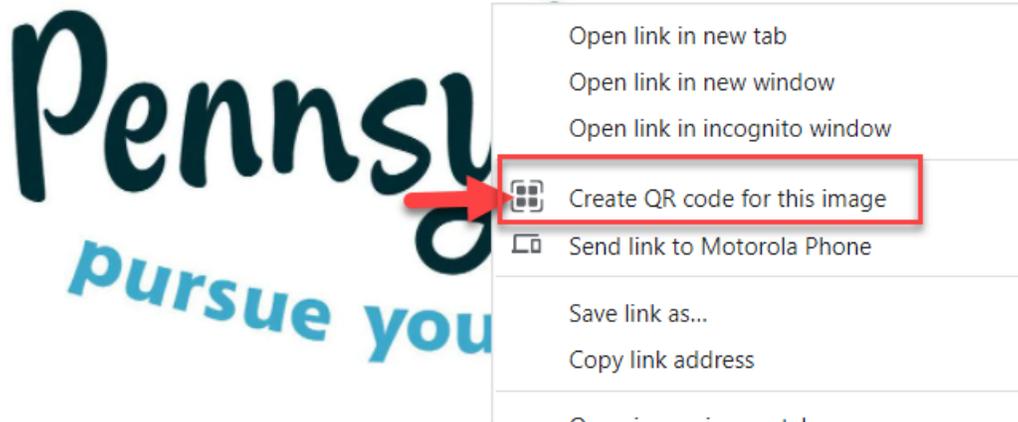


Figure 20

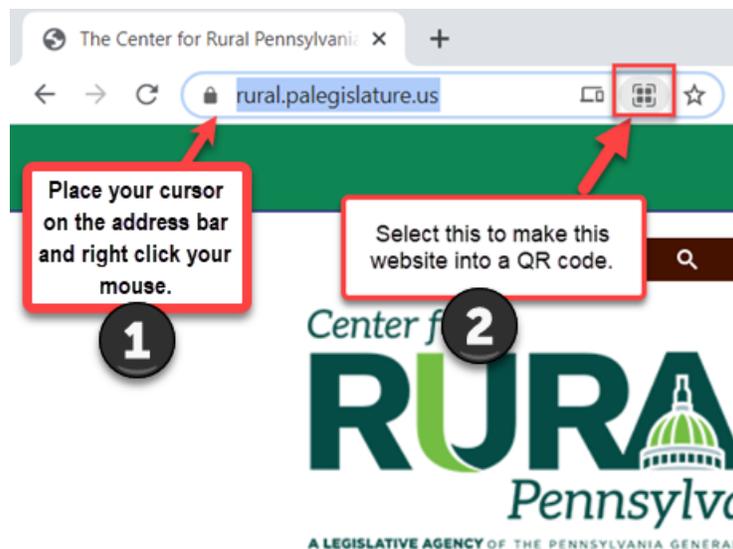


Figure 21

### Managing Seasonality: Staying relevant throughout the year

Most tourism businesses have seasonality, which means traffic to the business rises and falls at different times of the year. These trends usually follow the year's seasons in predictable patterns called peak (or high) season and off-peak (or low) season. Unless your agritourism business is winter-focused (with activities such as outdoor recreation for skiing, snowmobiling, or holiday events) then your peak season is probably the summer, and your off-season is the winter. The seasons in between – spring and fall – are called the shoulder seasons.

Some ideas to keep business going during the off and shoulder seasons are:

- Engage locals in the offseason.
- Offer discounts.

- Hold festivals and events to create a special reason for visiting.
- Embrace what each season brings through seasonal themes.

Also, do not feel that you have to produce constantly. It's okay to take time off from the agritourism part of your farm. Being a seasonal business is fine, assuming it fits into your overall financial business plan.

## Ready, Set, Connect!

### Networking and Professional Community Building

Networking is a form of relationship-building that can benefit your business. Professional associations are great places to build relationships with like-minded people. Networking:

- Builds your business confidence.
- Builds your business's visibility.
- Can increase your credibility.
- Helps you find support and relevant information.
- Helps you share referrals.
- Raises your self-awareness.
- Helps businesses share ideas, and,
- Strengthens your business connections.

Networks can be virtual, face-to-face, or a mix of both. These can also operate on different geographical scales such as local, state, national, or international. Networks can be formal or informal. Many formal organizations have membership fees that offset the administrative costs of running the association. Professional associations will host social gatherings, conferences, and educational sessions for their members to gather. Others provide advocacy on behalf of their members and their industries. Some associations offer additional perks, like negotiated group discounts, employment boards for job postings, mentorship networks, and educational or instructional opportunities.

It can be challenging to invest time and money as your business grows in association memberships. So, consider starting small with a regional or state organization, instead of a national one. Regional associations are less expensive to join and can also help you avoid feeling lost in the crowd.

Some suggestions for associations are:

- [Farmers Market Coalition](#)
- [Pennsylvania Association of Bed and Breakfast Inns and Farm Stays](#)
- [Pennsylvania Farm Bureau](#)
- [Pennsylvania Farm Vacation Association](#)

- [Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging Association](#)
- [Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs](#)
- [Pennsylvania Winery Association](#)

We have listed more possibilities for you to consider in [Part Four](#) of the book. Another partner to have on your side is the state tourism office and your area destination marketing organization, which we will also discuss in the next section.

## **Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (PA DCED) & the Pennsylvania Tourism Office <sup>2</sup>**

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) is the official state organization that houses the Pennsylvania Tourism Office. The mission of DCED is:

*“To encourage the shared prosperity of all Pennsylvanians by supporting good stewardship and sustainable development initiatives across our commonwealth. With a keen eye toward diversity and inclusiveness, we act as advisors and advocates, providing strategic technical assistance, training, and financial resources to help our communities and industries flourish”* ([DCED](#), 2021).

The official Pennsylvania Tourism Office is the travel and tourism entity of Pennsylvania. The PA Tourism Office is responsible for creating and managing VisitPA.com, Pennsylvania’s official tourism promotion website. The key responsibilities and goals of the PA Tourism office are to help tourism assets, like your farm business, grow by properly executing and organizing media strategies and marketing, job creation, budgets/funding, generating awareness, and providing access to industry research.

### **Marketing Opportunities with the PA Tourism Office**

While it is important to establish your brand and raise its visibility, there are other larger brands with which you can affiliate. Affiliating with these lends more credibility to your business's brand.

You may have noticed that you can easily identify offices and departments affiliated with the state government through their distinct yellow keystone logo. The state’s tourism brand is different because it promotes the state to outside visitors. This brand uses a distinct logo and slogan, “[Pursue Your Happiness](#),” for their channels (see Figure 22).

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<sup>2</sup> This section was authored by Eliza Richardson '21, Tourism, Hospitality, and Event Studies student at California University of Pennsylvania.



Figure 22

Visit PA has several opportunities on its website VisitPA.com and its official visitor guide called “The Happy Traveler.” These include:

- Listing for your business or events on VisitPA.com, the official state website for visitors to and within Pennsylvania.
- Paid Advertising opportunities via VisitPA.com, official social channels, promoted deals, e-newsletters, and the digital and printed official visitor guide “The Happy Traveler.”
- The “Pennsylvania on Display” brochure distribution program puts print materials at official Pennsylvania Turnpike Plazas and Welcome Centers.

Some opportunities are free, such as a simple business or event listing on VisitPa.com. Others are paid based on space or impressions. An impression means the number of times something is shown to someone searching on the internet.

While it is important to establish your brand and raise its visibility, being affiliated with reputable brands lends more credibility to yours. By partnering with the PA Tourism Office and following its guidelines, you can use the PA tourism logo on your materials. Linking back to the tourism office is a great idea because this expands your electronic network.

### **Visit PA**

[VisitPA.com](http://VisitPA.com) is the official tourism website for Pennsylvania. It is housed under the Pennsylvania Tourism Office and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development ([DCED](#)). VisitPA.com contains information that is easily accessible to tourists and business owners alike and is a critical resource that can aid in marketing, networking, research, and funding.

VisitPA.com can help steer more visitors to your business. The site lists contact information, travel guides, businesses, and attractions for people interested in visiting Pennsylvania. You can

submit any special events to the events calendar through this site and list farm business, site, or attractions free of charge.

VisitPA.com also has a “trip ideas” segment that categorizes attractions such as hiking, fishing, outdoor life, wineries, etc., so travelers can find specialized information. Listing your specific business or attraction into these categories can help to attract potential customers. Some of the additional things you can find on this website include, but are not limited to:

- Categorized promotional information on the entire state’s destinations, restaurants, events, and attractions throughout the state,
- Marketing opportunities,
- Industry research and statistics,
- Trip ideas and travel guides,
- Statewide and regional maps,
- Newsletters and contact information.

VisitPA.com divides the state into 11 different tourism regions, as seen in Figure 23.

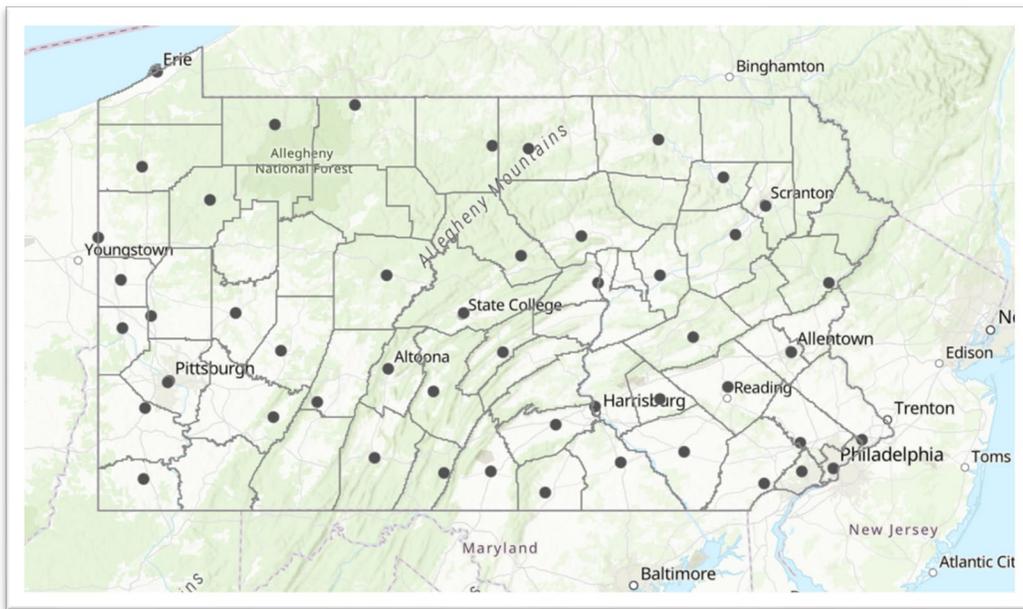


Figure 23

For more information on each specific region, visit <https://www.visitpa.com/regions>. VisitPA.com also lists all the recognized Destination Marketing Organizations located within the state, which you will learn more about in the following section.

## Your Destination Marketing Organization

Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) are crucial resources that can be integral to further developing your business in agritourism. It is first necessary to note that some other terms and abbreviations are generally synonymous with DMO, such as Destination Management Organization, Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), and Tourism Promotion Agency (TPA). Figure 24 highlights the various locations of the 50 recognized DMOs in Pennsylvania.



**Figure 24** DMO locations in Pennsylvania (ArcGIS Online and Eliza Richardson)

Each destination marketing organization is structured differently, and they vary by size, with some representing specific destinations, such as the City of Pittsburgh (Visit Pittsburgh) or individual counties, such as Visit Beaver County. Some DMOs, especially in rural areas with smaller populations, represent regional areas that may encompass multiple destinations and counties, such as the PA Route 6 Alliance. However, size and scale aside, the main responsibilities and objectives of these organizations remain the same. Simply put, DMOs manage and support networking, marketing, and promoting represented destination areas to generate visitation and visitor spending.

While site appearances vary, the general format of most DMO websites remains the same, with tabs dedicated to things to do, events, contact information, and more. These organizations are funded predominantly by the state's hotel occupancy tax and in part by the fees that businesses pay to partner with or become a member of the DMO or through advertising

revenue. Paying to become a member or partner of your DMO/CVB/TPA will expose your agritourism business to a wide variety of resources and lucrative opportunities and can have a multitude of benefits. Some examples include:

- Marketing and promotion of your destination, events, or small business,
- Access to research, including statistics, annual reports, economic impact studies, etc.,
- Networking opportunities with other tourism businesses and professionals,
- Social media advertising,
- Access to development and funding opportunities through grants and marketing.

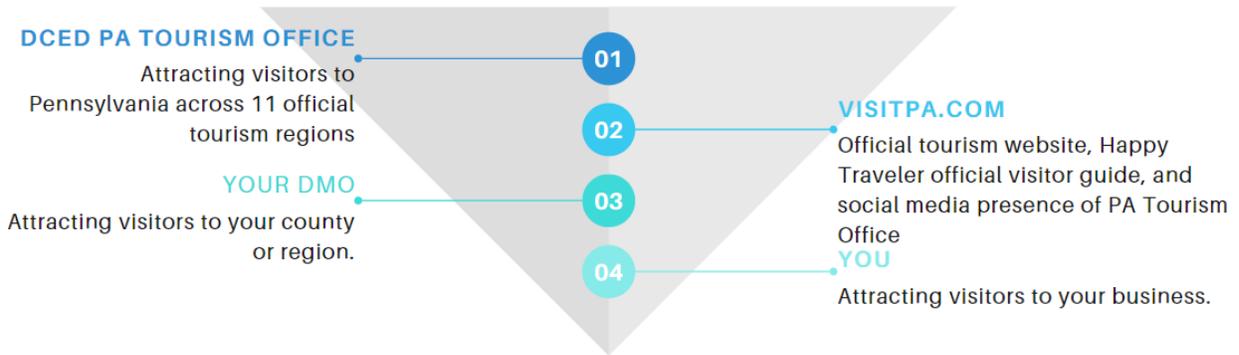
This list is not extensive. However, as previously stated, each DMO may be equipped with different resources, and no two DMOs are structured the same, so be sure to contact your local DMO for more specialized information.

Although it is not free to become a member or partner with your local DMO, it is a worthwhile investment that can help give your agritourism business or operation the exposure it needs to increase visitation. Some DMOs have marketing specialists that can create custom programs specifically designed to your market and budget needs. DMOs are there to market your destination so that you can efficiently run your business.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, have become a huge medium for marketing, with most organizations having their accounts and some even designating their own “social media manager or marketer.” By affiliating with your local DMO, your business can be promoted on their social media platforms, which can attract many customers to your business.

If the state’s many different organizations, departments, and sites seem confusing to navigate in any way, it can help to think of it as a funnel (see Figure 25 below).

## FUNNELING VISITORS TO YOUR AGRITOURISM OPERATION FROM THE STATE LEVEL TO YOU



**Figure 25**

Visualizing it like this can make it easier to understand the size and scope of each of these divisions. While the Pennsylvania DCED might be in charge of the state’s tourism industry as a whole, your local DMO will most likely provide the most concentrated and specific resources to help your business thrive. These divisions all work together to make up Pennsylvania’s travel and tourism promotion machine.

A complete listing of each recognized DMO in Pennsylvania (2019) is available on [VisitPA.com’s industry website](#).

### **PA Preferred**

PA Preferred is another brand affiliate to consider. It is the official branding program for Pennsylvania’s local foods and farms (Agriculture.pa.gov, 2021). There is PA Preferred and PA Preferred Organic. Both are a sign of agricultural quality, which builds credibility (see Figure 26). Also, PA Preferred has the ability to market Pennsylvania agricultural products with a much larger reach than a singular business. To join, there is an application process, but there is no cost to affiliate. Some food products have a licensing fee to use the PA Preferred logo on their labels, such as honey and wine. You can find more information and the application at the website:

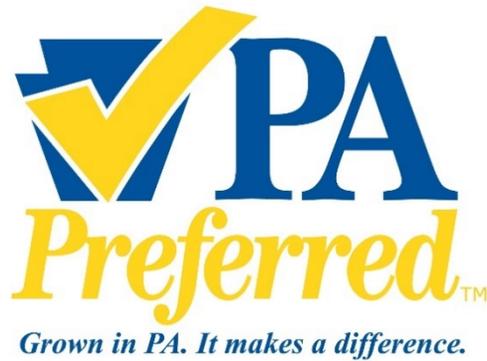


Figure 26

## Other Marketing Support

### *Agricultural Commodity Marketing Boards*

Pennsylvania offers several crop and agricultural product-specific boards. These are designed for a specific product and help farmers by pooling resources to market a specific commodity type.

ACMBs in Pennsylvania include the:

- PA Apple Program,
- PA Dairy Program,
- PA Peach and Nectarine Research Program,
- PA Potato Research Program,
- PA Vegetable Marketing and Research,
- PA Wine Marketing and Research Program.

### *A Pennsylvania Farm Bill Program*

The [Pennsylvania Farm Bill](#) was signed into law by Governor Wolf in 2020 and at the time of this publication was still in its rollout phase (Agriculture.pa.gov, 2021). This bill was designed to support farmers in several ways, and one of those is for business growth and new opportunities, including agritourism. It includes several grants and tax incentive programs, such as:

- Ag and Youth Grant Program,
- Ag Business Development Center,
- Center for Poultry & Livestock Excellence Funding,
- Conservation Excellence Grant Program,
- Dairy Investment Grants Program,
- Farm to School Grant Program,
- Farm Vitality Grant Program,
- PA Preferred Organic,
- Resource Enhancement & Protection Program,

- Specialty Crop Block Grant Program,
- Urban Agriculture,
- Very Small Meat Processor.

### ***Crowdfunding***

Commodity marketing boards are not the only groups that pool resources. There are other funding options other than those from the government or direct lending using pooled resources called [crowdfunding](#). Crowdfunding provides access to funds through the shared contributions of a large number of people. A crowd of like-minded people gets together through a crowdfunding website. Here are a few for you to explore:

- [Go Steward](#) Funds regenerative agriculture
- [Honeycomb](#)
- [Kickstarter](#)

## **Some Trends to Watch and Consider**

As we wrap up the book, we wanted you to know about some tourism and post-COVID trends that may help your farm-based business. Monitoring industry news will help you keep track of the changes in the marketplace. This monitoring should be part of your ongoing business and marketing planning.

- **Being purpose-driven**
  - Being purpose-driven means you identify with a social, cultural, environmental concern or cause. If you support or identify with wildlife protection, habitat restoration, sustainable farming, community traditions, fair trade goods, organic eating, or nature as therapy, that theme should be part of your brand. Your guests may identify with you as long as your commitment to the purpose is authentic. Customers feel good supporting causes and actions that resonate with them. Customers will pay extra to support something they also support or feel good about.
- **Eating healthy and organic**
  - Healthy lifestyles and “free-from” foods are important to a growing group of people. Customers are more health-conscious than ever. They also look for products free from various ingredients like gluten, dairy, wheat, pesticide use, antibiotics, etc.
- **Farm-to-table and culinary tourism**
  - Farm-to-table or farm-to-fork is a movement where local items are prioritized and preferred over those imported from outside the area. Local sourcing means

that the items come from the local areas. Hyper-local sourcing means it is grown on the property where it is consumed. Culinary (food or gastro) tourism is a form of tourism where the food is the attraction. The attraction can be ingredients, freshness, a local, ethnic, or family specialization, or can include cocktails, spirits, desserts, confections, produce, entrees, or simply anything you can eat or drink. It can include sampling, eating, preparing, learning about, or being involved in any part of the food or drink preparation process.

- **Hands-on or immersive experiences**
  - Agritourism is not a farm-based theme park, where everything is staged and created to be a show. Guests want authenticity. Many guests are looking for hands-on or [immersive experiences](#).
- **Picture-happy everything**
  - Your guests like to photo document their lives and [post](#) to social media. Give them a great background for their pictures. They'll be your marketer to attract more customers to your business if they like what they see. For more help, you might want to refer to the earlier section on [social media](#).
- **Local and authentic experiences**
  - Guests enjoy supporting what is local. This authenticity is often what attracted them to your farm over a commercial alternative. They seek your uniqueness and not your sameness.
- **Multigenerational market**
  - Families are traveling together more with their kids and their parents or other extended families. For example, consider how your farm-based business can be enjoyed by grandparents and their grandkids together.

## **Other Trends that will Probably Continue Post-COVID**

- **Convenience-based shopping**
  - Many customers will continue to want convenient shopping, such as mobile and online ordering and curbside pick-up.
- **Contactless information and payments**
  - Customers are increasingly using their phones for easy access to information. They carry cash and wallets less and less. The more convenient it is for your guest to get information, shop, and pay, you will have more chances for sales.
- **Extra attention to sanitation**
  - Social distancing and more intense hand hygiene practices will continue to be practiced by many guests. Support them by telling them about your commitment

to their safety through continued sanitizing practices, offer sanitizing stations, and make sure your employees are committed to your standards.

- **Lingering concerns about crowd density and the ability to reserve times**
  - Consider giving options to book slots or times for events in advance, shopping times, or stays. Have attendance or occupancy information handy if guests ask.
- **Masks, even long after they are no longer mandated**
  - Some of your guests may still feel most comfortable wearing a mask. Create an environment where all guests are welcome, and masks on or off are OK.

## **Putting it All Together: Business Growth and Thinking Sustainably**

Now that you have an eye on some of the trends that may be growth opportunities for your business let's talk a bit about growth and sustaining that growth through responsible business practices.

### **Business Growth: Maintain a Cycle of Business Planning**

Once you are through a successful startup and business establishment, you might be looking to grow your business. Similar to inventorying your assets and conducting a SWOT analysis, business growth also takes introspective work. Your initial goal was probably to get started and attract customers. If you have achieved that goal, it is time to update your business plan.

The activities you performed to get started should be ongoing. You should regularly perform your SWOT analysis and use the insight you have gained through research and networking to refine the business goals that feed into your business plan. Your business plan should be updated about once per year. Aim to update it in your low season when you have the presence of mind to focus on the future.

Your business plan is a process and not just paperwork. Business planning, SWOT analysis, building insight through research, learning from your networking should be part of a dynamic process of reevaluation, assessment, and new goal setting. Business planning is ongoing and not just a one-time document to secure financing and then forget (see Figure 27).

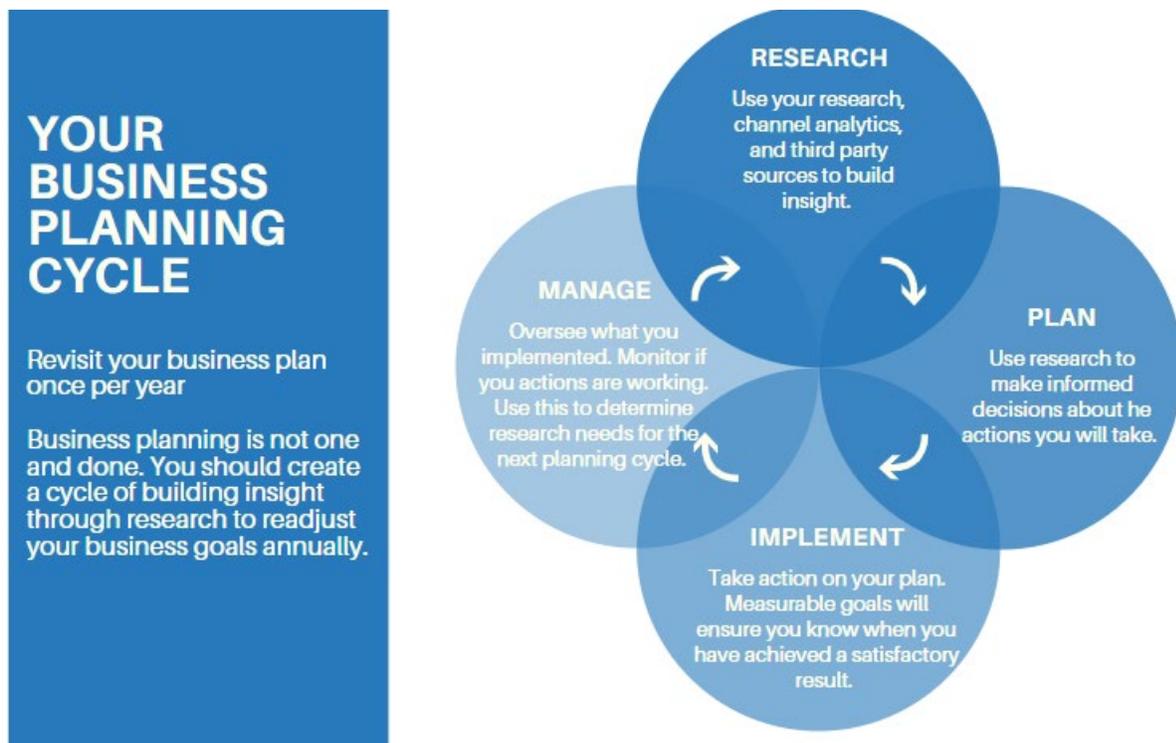


Figure 27

The first step to revisiting your business plan is conducting an enterprise audit. Think of the enterprise audit process as a report card for how you are doing so far. *The Entrepreneur’s Guide to Starting and Growing a Business in Pennsylvania* (2019) offers an [Enterprise Audit Checklist](#) to help. Even if you are not necessarily considering business expansion, a thorough understanding of business growth concepts will help to prepare you for common business tasks and possible future growth.

Your eventual growth strategy can be simplified by compartmentalizing your choices into four basic categories. Your business is comprised of products and markets, the goods and services you sell, and the people who buy them; that which is consumed and the consumer. Growth strategies can be simplified into thinking about this fundamental subdivision of product and market. The evolution of your business can be subdivided by making changes or staying the same on either the product or market side of the business, which leaves four simplified business opportunities:

- 1. Penetration**
  - Keep your markets and products the same as you have now.
- 2. Market development**
  - Change your target market.
- 3. Product development**
  - Change your product.

#### 4. Diversification

- Change your market and your product.

This simplified way of compartmentalizing your options is called the development opportunity matrix (Fletcher et al., 2017). It can help you visualize your options so that it seems less overwhelming. To meet either one of these four options of penetration, market development, product development, or diversification means that you have to care for what you have now to continue to produce for your business in the future. This care requires a sustainable approach.

[Sustainability](#) means planning to preserve the resources of a business. Let's consider a simple example that begins with poor planning and leads to unsustainable outcomes. Suppose that a farm business provides haunted hayrides during October. To prepare for this event, employees distribute flyers and tell their friends about the haunted hayrides. The farm has enough parking spaces for 40 cars, but too many visitors arrive at the farm on the opening day of the hayrides. As a result, 30 additional parking spaces are improvised, resulting in limited space available for the hayrides. The additional volume of customers also makes visitors wait a very long time for hayrides, causing some customers to leave early. Once the event is over, the farm owner notices that the additional traffic has caused a lot of degrading damage to the landscape. Issues such as these are issues of poor planning and bad management, which contribute to issues of sustainability.

In the above example, several problems lead to a situation that is not sustainable for the business. The first problem is too much advertising for the capacity of the business. Farm parking was nearly half of that required for visitor volume. Too many visitors lead to reduced service quality (long waiting time) and damage to the farmland. All of this also damages the customer experience, which might lead to poor online reviews. It's a negative cycle.

Another way of describing a larger volume of visitors is to say that there has been a significant increase in demand for the product. As a result, the product has become more valuable. One way to control over-capacity visitation is to slowly raise prices until visitor volume reaches the maximum sustainable level. In the hayride example, suppose that the owner decides to start charging \$5 a day for parking. This price increase might reduce the visitor volume by 10 percent while also increasing revenue. Even a 10 percent decrease in volume would result in a parking volume of 63 cars. So, the next day suppose the farmer raises the cost for hayrides by \$1. This change results in a volume of 45 cars on the third day. The owner decides that adding five additional parking spaces is a sustainable option.

In business terms, the supply of haunted hayride capacity can meet the demand for hayride services because of price adjustments. Two weeks later, visitor volume might begin to decline, and the owner might decide to promote the business by advertising two dollars off coupons in the local newspaper or by placing an ad with a local radio station. This approach might help to secure a few more visitors when the volume is low.

Sustainability is about preserving resources and the integrity of your product. Resources can include those needed for business operations or resources of the natural environment. Both should be considered as a part of a sustainability strategy. Tourism that is not sustainable will eventually degrade to the point that people do not care to visit anymore. The natural environment must be protected in a quality state to ensure the future of the business. Ultimately, thinking sustainably keeps a balance of the needs of people, planet, and profit, which is the ultimate win-win for the long-term viability of your business.

Now that we have covered some of the basic strategies for success, it's time to move onto Part Four, which will provide you with some additional resources beyond this handbook.

## Part Four: Help Beyond the Book

In this section, we will:

- Direct you to places to find important resources to help your business get started, grow, and thrive.
- List some additional associations and organizations with which you may want to explore and connect.
- Provide links to other free agritourism learning resources.
- List the outside sources we used beyond our personal knowledge to help us write this book.

Throughout the handbook, we marked areas where you would find additional reading under that topic. There were also links throughout the book to take you directly to an outside source. In this section, we have a few additional sources for you to explore along your agritourism journey. Some are repeats from the body of the handbook. Our goal is to provide you with a convenient list for your reference.

### List of Common Pennsylvania Agritourism Abbreviations

AAPA Agritourism Activity Protection Act  
AASL Agricultural Area Security Law  
ADA Americans with Disabilities Act  
ASA Agricultural Security Area  
AWA Animal Welfare Act  
CDC Center for Disease Control  
CVB Convention and Visitors Bureau  
DBA Doing Business As  
DCED Department of Community and Economic Development  
DCNR Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
DLI Department of Labor and Industry  
DMO Destination Marketing or Management Organization  
EIN Employer Identification Number  
FIF Pennsylvania First Industries Fund  
GACP General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
ITIN Individual Tax Identification Number  
MPC Municipal Planning Code  
NASS National Agricultural Statistics Service  
QR Quick Response  
OSHA Occupational Health and Safety Administration  
PAP Pennsylvania Preferred  
PDA Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture  
PDEP Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection  
PFB Pennsylvania Farm Bureau  
PFB Pennsylvania Farm Bill

PFVA Pennsylvania Farm Vacation Association  
PFBC Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission  
PGC Pennsylvania Game Commission  
PLCB Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board  
PMPC Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code  
PRFA Pennsylvania Right to Farm Act  
PR&LA Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging Association  
PTO Pennsylvania Tourism Office, Pennsylvania Office of Marketing Tourism and Film  
PWA Pennsylvania Winery Association  
PSACF Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs  
SBA Small Business Association  
SBDC Small Business Development Centers  
SEO Search Engine Optimization  
SERP Search Engine Results Page  
SWOT Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats  
TODS Tourism Orientation and Directional Signage  
TPA Tourism Promotion Agency  
UCC Uniform Construction Code  
USDA United States Department of Agriculture

## Find Pennsylvania Government Information

[Commonwealth Phone Directory](#) Lookup office phone numbers for everything government  
[Government of Pennsylvania Directory](#) Lists websites, social media, and email  
[Pennsylvania General Assembly](#) Look up and follow legislators and legislation

## Additional Sources

- [American Farm Bureau Federation](#)
- [Center for Rural Pennsylvania](#)
- [Get Outdoors PA](#)
- [National Association of State Departments of Agriculture](#)
- [Outdoor Industry Association](#)
- [Farmers Market Coalition](#)
- [PA Farm Vacation Association](#)
- [Penn State Agricultural Extension](#)
- [Pennsylvania Association of Bed and Breakfasts Inns and Farm Stays](#)
- [Pennsylvania Campground Owners Association](#)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture](#)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources](#)
- [Pennsylvania Farm Bureau](#)
- [Pennsylvania Farmer's Union](#)
- [Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission](#)
- [Pennsylvania Game Commission](#)

- [Pennsylvania General Assembly Legislation Quick Search](#)
- [Pennsylvania Grange](#)
- [Pennsylvania Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service \(NASS-PA\)](#)
- [Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging Association](#)
- [Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs](#)
- [Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors](#)
- [Pennsylvania State Council of Farm Organizations](#)
- [Pennsylvania Tourism Office](#)
- [Pennsylvania Sustainable Agriculture Association](#)
- [Pennsylvania Travel and Tourism Partnership](#)
- [Pennsylvania Wine Association](#)
- [USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service](#)
- [WeConservePA](#), formerly Pennsylvania Land Trust Association

### **Other Recent and Free Handbooks, Guides, Articles, Podcasts, Fact Sheets, and Self-Paced Training**

Here are some other handbooks, manuals, and guides from other states, provinces, and regions that you may also find helpful:

- [Agriculture Marketing Resource Center \(AgMRC\), A Guide to Successful Agritourism Enterprises \(2019\)](#)
- [Agritourism is Georgia Grown Fun: Best Industry Practices and Training Manual \(2018\)](#)
- [American Planning Association Knowledgebase Collection Agritourism](#)
- [Developing Montana’s Agritourism: Education, Opportunities, and Resources \(2021\)](#)
- [Farm Commons Law Library: Search Agritourism](#)
- [Farms Reach Growing Farmer Networks](#)
- [Farm Diversification Through Agri-tourism: A Manual to Guide Development in British Columbia \(2017\)](#)
- [Florida Agritourism Association Florida Agritourism Toolkit \(2017\)](#)
- [Hawaii County Guidebook for Agritourism and Nature Tourism \(2015\)](#)
- [Kansas Agritourism Manual - Growing Agritourism in Kansas \(2019\)](#)
- [Louisiana State University AgCenter Agritourism Best Management Practices \(2016\)](#)
- [National Young Farmers Coalition Farmer’s Guide to Direct Sales Platforms \(2020\)](#)
- [North Dakota State University Agri-tourism Farm and Ranch Recreation Resource Directory \(2018\)](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Customer Service Strategies \(2016\)](#)
- [Oregon Agritourism Network Agritourism Handbook \(2017\)](#)
- [Penn State Extension Agritourism in Pennsylvania 2019 Update](#)
- [Penn State Extension Guide to Farming in Pennsylvania: Planning \(2016\)](#)
- [Pennsylvania Small Business Development Seminars Online Learning Webinars and Tutorials](#)

- [Pennsylvania Direct Farm Business Guide \(2013\)](#)
- [South Carolina Agritourism 101; A Manual for Successful Agritourism \(2020\)](#)
- [The Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Agritourism in Virginia \(2017\)](#)
- [University of Vermont UVM Extension Agritourism Resource Hub \(2021\)](#)
- [Virginia Planning for Agritourism, Local Permitting for Farm Enterprises \(2015\)](#)
- [Vermont Agritourism Collaborative](#)
- [Washington State Department of Agriculture Handbook for Small and Direct Marketing Farms \(2014\)](#)

## Cited and Referenced Handbooks, Articles, or Other Work

This list consists of titles that were cited in the handbook. Some might also help you further your understanding of agritourism and related topics. We sincerely hope that this handbook helps you to achieve your goals by providing the best information for developing your business into a more prosperous enterprise.

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# Glossary

**Android:** A type of mobile device operating system for tablets, smart watches, and phones that uses Microsoft Windows. [Return](#)

**Agri-education:** A classification of agritourism where guests learn about agriculture. [Return](#)

**Agri-lodging:** Having overnight guests on a working or historical farm such as a bed and breakfast, inn, or dude ranch. [Return](#)

**Agritourism:** Activities on a historical or working farm that add revenue to that farm in a way that agriculture or agricultural heritage is important. [Return](#)

**Agritourist:** A person who comes from outside the local area and engages in farm-based or agricultural activities as a form of recreation. [Return](#)

**Agri-tainment:** A classification of agritourism where the guests have fun or are entertained. [Return](#)

**App:** A digital tool that is on your computer, tablet, or phone [Return](#)

**Assets:** Things that you have on your farm that are useful for your farm-based business. These can be people, places, or things. [Return](#)

**Booking platform:** An internet-based tool that helps you schedule events and stays. These usually collect a commission. [Return](#)

**Brand:** The identity of your business that sets expectations to a prospective customer. [Return](#)

**Business plan:** A formal written document that details your business goals and how you will achieve them. [Return](#)

**Channel:** A way that you distribute information about your business. [Return](#)

**Channel management:** Making sure that the information on your channels is up to date and consistent. [Return](#)

**Churn:** When employees or customers leave, generally due to discontent, and do not return. [Return](#)

**Code:** A system of rules for buildings and structures that are set by the local government. Code is also a language computers use to display information to people viewing it on a screen. [Return](#)

**Competition:** A company that sells the same or similar products and services as you do to the same group of people. [Return](#)

**Cooperative:** A business structure where resources and ownership is shared. [Return](#)

**Corporation:** A business structure that separates the owner from the business legally. [Return](#)

**Cost containment:** Controlling what your business spends so there is more money left for profit. [Return](#)

**Cottage kitchen:** A place where food is prepared in a residential setting like a home. [Return](#)

**Crowdfunding:** A way to pool money with a group of people instead of borrowing through a traditional bank. [Return](#)

**Customer retention:** When your business keeps a consumer because they are satisfied with your goods and/or services. [Return](#)

**D2C:** An acronym for direct to consumer, such as a farm market, online marketplace, or farm stand. [Return](#)

**Destination Marketing Organization:** Sometimes, these are called DMOs, CVBs, or TPAs. These are the organizations that promote their regions to encourage people from outside the local area to visit and spend money in the area. [Return](#)

**EIN:** An employer identification number that is unique to your business for taxes and banking, like a social security number is unique to a person. [Return](#)

**Engagement:** When people feel connected to what you are doing. [Return](#)

**Excise tax:** A tax levied by the government at the point you make it instead of at the point of sale. [Return](#)

**FAM tour:** A short form for familiarization tour, which is when you invite those that may help you promote your business to experience it. [Return](#)

**Farm retail:** Farm-based goods that are sold from the farm or at a market. [Return](#)

**Fictitious name:** A name used to do business with if your business name is not the same as your legal first and last name. [Return](#)

**Followers:** People who choose to have a relationship with a person or company online through social channels. [Return](#)

**Goods to services continuum:** A way to visualize the difference between tangible and intangible things that can be sold. [Return](#)

**Hashtag:** When you use the number sign (#) to identify keywords in your social media post. [Return](#)

**Immersive experiences:** Things to do that are very hands-on and dedicated to a complete experience. [Return](#)

**Influencer:** A person who has a significant group of followers on their social channels who can spread positive word of mouth about your business. [Return](#)

**Interpretation:** Explaining the meaning of something to visitors. [Return](#)

**iOS:** The operating system for mobile devices that are made by Apple. [Return](#)

**Liability:** The responsibility of you or your business for bad things that might happen to guests on your property or from using the items you sell. [Return](#)

**Marketing Mix:** A way to visualize the areas you need to understand to match what you are selling in the right way to someone whose needs will be met by buying it. [Return](#)

**Marketing:** A process that focuses on the needs of the buyer that leads to profits by meeting the buyer's needs. [Return](#)

**Meta-elements:** The invisible parts of a webpage that help a search engine find it. [Return](#)

**Mission:** A simple short statement that defines what your business does and represents. [Return](#)

**Multigenerational market:** A group that travels with extended family members such as grandparents or grandchildren. [Return](#)

**Operating system:** The main language system that your computer uses to operate such as Windows or Apple MacOS. [Return](#)

**Ordinance:** Rules made by local government. [Return](#)

**Organic search:** Sometimes called natural search, these are the results using a search engine like Google or Bing, that were not part of paid placement. [Return](#)

**Partnership:** A business structure when there are two or more owners. [Return](#)

**Payment solution:** A digital tool where customers can pay you without handling cash or using a physical credit or debit card. [Return](#)

**Post:** When you put something on the internet using a social media platform like Instagram, Twitter, or LinkedIn. [Return](#)

**Product:** Something that is sold to a customer that can be tangible or intangible. [Return](#)

**Productivity suite:** A group of computer tools that help with business functions like creating documents, emails, and spreadsheets. [Return](#)

**Promotion:** A means of communicating with existing and potential customers. [Return](#)

**Publicity:** Creating hype, buzz, or news about your business. [Return](#)

**Purpose-driven:** Having a social, political, or community cause associated or as a main driver of your business. [Return](#)

**QR code:** a symbol that a user can scan with their phone's camera that allows them to view that information on their phone. [Return](#)

**Recreationist:** A person who engages in leisure activities from within the local area. [Return](#)

**Sales:** An activity that focuses on the needs of the seller and eventually leads to profit through volume of transactions. [Return](#)

**Sense of place:** The way a region or area makes you feel based on all of its characteristics. [Return](#)

**SEO:** This is a short form for search engine optimization, which means that there is a strategy for how Google finds your website. [Return](#)

**SERP** – This is the short form for a search engine results page. This is the page that comes up when you enter a keyword and hit enter in a search engine like Google. [Return](#)

**Service animal:** An animal that is used for a person who is disabled to fulfill their daily living activities. [Return](#)

**Service recovery:** Resolving a problem when a customer has had a bad experience. [Return](#)

**Service:** Something that is sold to a customer but is intangible and experienced. [Return](#)

**Social media:** Digital interfaces that allow users to exchange visual and written information. [Return](#)

**Sole proprietorship:** A simple business structure when one person is the owner and operator. [Return](#)

**Sustainability:** The ability to meet the development needs of your business now, without compromising the ability of the next generation to do the same by taking care of environmental, cultural, and economic resources. Sustainability is a balance of the needs of the planet, people, and profit. [Return](#)

**SWOT Analysis:** A tool to help you break down the positives and negatives of your business so you can plan more effectively. [Return](#)

**Tag:** When on social media, another user or business is formally mentioned in your post. [Return](#)

**Target market:** The group that you have decided is the best to promote and sell your products and services. [Return](#)

**The cloud:** Digital space on the internet that you use to store and modify computer files instead of keeping them on one device. [Return](#)

**TODS:** This is a short form for tourism orientation and directional signage. These are official signs that help visitors find attractions, services, and places to stay. [Return](#)

**Touchpoints:** When your customers encounter your brand. These can be digital or physical. [Return](#)

**Tourist:** A person who comes from outside the local area for business, pleasure, or visiting friends and relatives. [Return](#)

**Zoning:** A land regulations system within a community. [Return](#)

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